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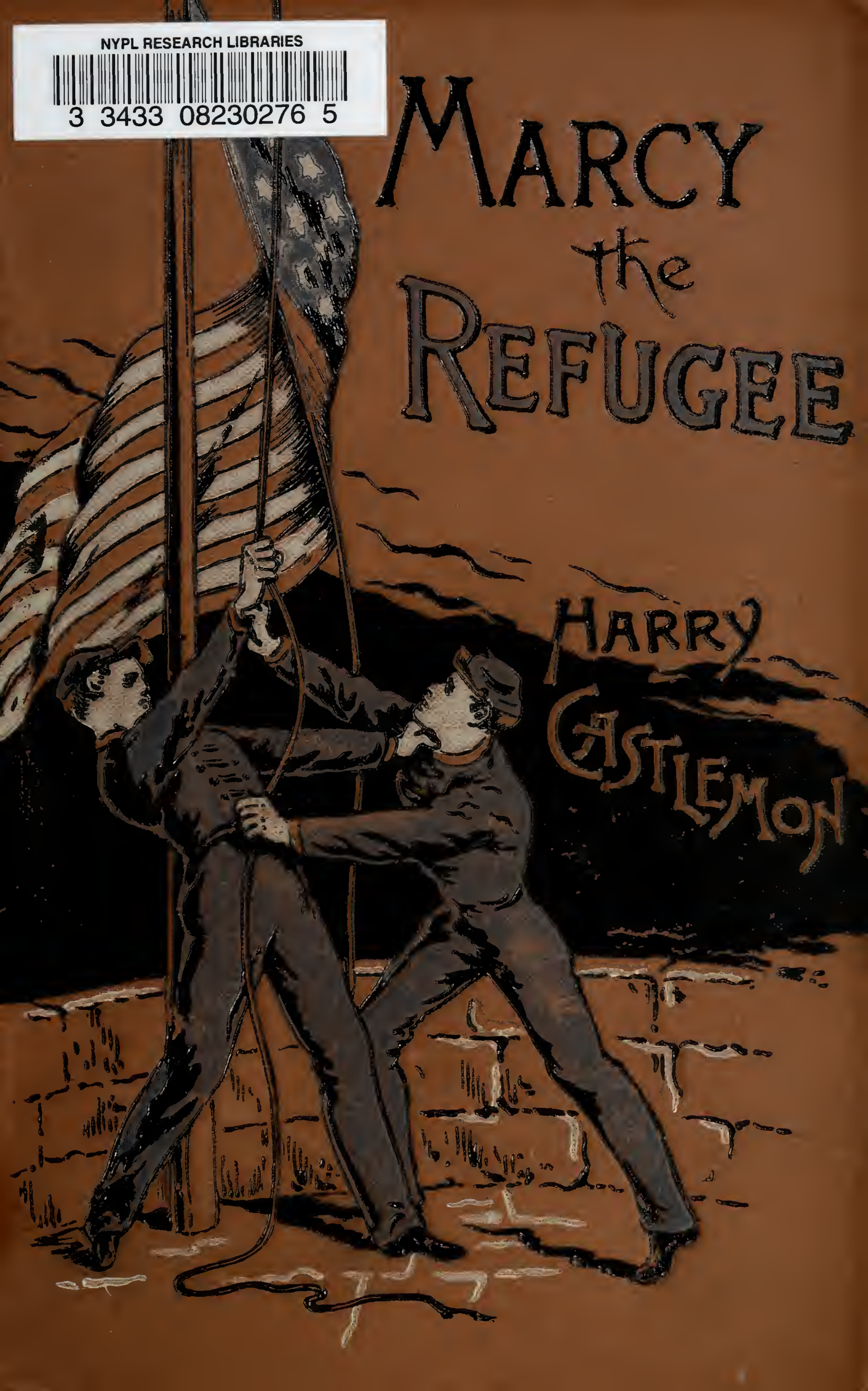
HARRY CASTLEMON



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Romeyn B. Zalinski.
From Papa.

Christmas, 1893.

NAS
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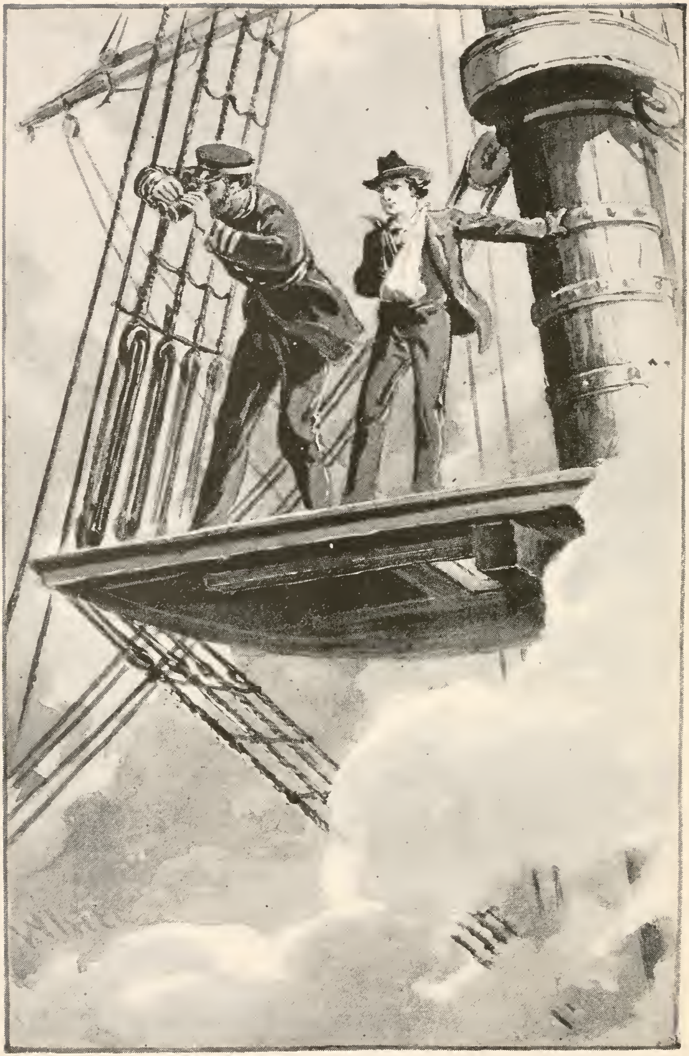
ROMEYN B ZABRISKIE



Marcy in Action.

CASTLEMON'S WAR SERIES.

MARCY, THE REFUGEE.

BY
HARRY CASTLEMON,
AUTHOR OF "GUNBOAT SERIES," "ROCKY MOUNTAIN SERIES,"
"SPORTSMAN'S CLUB SERIES," ETC., ETC.

Four Illustrations by Geo. G. White.

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CONTENTS.

CHAPTER PAGE
I. What Brought Beardsley Home, . 1
II. Allison is Surprised, ... 23
III. The Neighborhood Gossip, ... 42
IV. Visitors in Plenty, ... 66
V. Marcy's Rash Wish, ... 92
VI. The Wish Gratified, ... 116
VII. Marcy Speaks His Mind, ... 140
VIII. The Arrival of the Fleet, . . . 164
IX. Looking for a Pilot, ... 190
X. Beardsley in Trouble, ... 214
XI. Marcy in Action, ... 239
XII. Home Again, ... 264
XIII. A Rebel Soldier Speaks, ... 287
XIV. A Yankee Scouting Party, . . . 310
XV. Marcy Sees Somebody, ... 340
XVI. A Friend in Gray, ... 361
XVII. Marcy Takes to the Swamp, . . . 385
XVIII. Conclusion, ... 406

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MARCY, THE REFUGEE.

CHAPTER I.

WHAT BROUGHT BEARDSLEY HOME.

IN this story we take up once more the history of the exploits and adventures of our Union hero Marcy Gray, the North Carolina boy, who tried so hard and so unsuccessfully to be "True to his Colors." Marcy, as we know, was loyal to the old flag but he had had few opportunities to prove it, until he took his brother, Sailor Jack, out to the Federal blockading fleet in his little schooner *Fairy Belle*, to give him a chance to enlist in the navy. That was by far the most dangerous undertaking in which Marcy had ever engaged, and at the time of which we write, he had not seen the beginning of the trouble it was destined to bring him. Not only was he liable to be overhauled by the Confederates when he attempted to pass their forts at Plymouth and Roanoke Island, but he was in danger of being shot to pieces by the watchful steam launches of the Union fleet that had of late taken to patrolling the coast. But he came through without any very serious mishaps, and returned to his home to find the plantation in an uproar, and his mother in a most anxious frame of mind.

Although Marcy Gray was a good pilot for that part of the coast, and knew all its little bays and out-of-the-way inlets as well as he knew the road from his home to the post-office, his older brother Jack was the real sailor of the family. He made his living on the water. At the time we first brought him to the notice of the reader he had been at sea for more than two years, and it was while he was on his way home that his vessel, the *Sabine*, fell into the hands of Captain Semmes, who had just begun his piratical career in the Confederate steamer *Sumter*. But, fortunately for Jack, Semmes was not as vigilant in those days as he afterward became. He gave the *Sabine's* crew an opportunity to recapture their vessel and escape from his power, and they were prompt to improve it. By the most skilful manœuvring, and without firing a shot, they made prisoners of the prize crew that Semmes had put on board the *Sabine*, turned them over to the Union naval authorities at Key West, and took their vessel to a Northern port. On the way to Boston, and while she was off the coast of North Carolina, the brig was pursued and fired at by a little schooner which turned out to be Captain Beardsley's privateer *Osprey*, on which Marcy Gray was serving in the capacity of pilot.

When Jack Gray found himself in Boston, the first thing he thought of was getting home. The Potomac being closely guarded against mail-carriers and smugglers who, in spite of all the precautions taken against them, continued to pass freely, and almost without detection, between the lines as long as the war lasted, the only plan he could pursue was to go by water. Being intensely loyal himself, Jack never dreamed that Northern men would be guilty of loading vessels to run the blockade, but there was at least one such craft in Boston—the *West Wind;* and through the good offices of his old commander, the captain of the *Sabine,* Jack Gray was shipped on board of her as second mate and pilot. Her cargo was duly consigned to some house in Havana, but the owners meant that it should be sold in Newbern; and there were scattered about among the bales and boxes in her hold, a good many packages that would have brought the vessel and all connected with her into serious trouble, if they had been discovered by the custom-house officers.

When the *West Wind* was a short distance out from Boston, the second mate learned by accident that one of his best foremast hands was also bound for his home in North Carolina. His name was Aleck Webster, and his father lived on a small plantation which was not more than an hour's ride from Nashville. Being a poor man Mr. Webster did not stand very high in the estimation of his rich neighbors, but that made no sort of difference to Jack Gray, and a warm and lasting friendship at once sprung up between officer and man.

Although they belonged to a vessel that was fitted out to run the blockade they were both strong for the Union, and many an hour of the mid-watch did they while away in talking over the situation. All they knew about their friends at home was that they were opposed to secession; but they dared not say so, because they were surrounded by rebels who would have been glad of an excuse to burn them out of house and home. The two friends got angry as often as they talked of these things, but of course they could not decide upon a plan of operations until they had been at home long enough to "see how the wind set," and "how the land lay." We have told what they did when they got ashore. When they were paid off and discharged in Newbern they made their way home by different routes, Jack arousing his brother in the dead of the night by tossing pebbles against his bedroom window, and afterward going off to the Federal fleet to enlist under the flag he believed in. Aleck Webster remained ashore for a longer time; and finding that his father belonged to an organized band of Union men who held secret meetings in the swamp, and whose object it was to oppose the tactics pursued by their rebel neighbors, he joined his fortunes with theirs, and went to work with such energy that in less that two weeks' time he had the settlement in such a panic that its prominent citizens thought seriously of calling upon the garrison at Plymouth for protection.

It was Mrs. Gray's misfortune to have many secret enemies about her, and the meanest and most dangerous among them were Lon Beardsley, who lived on an adjoining plantation, and was the owner and captain of the schooner to which Marcy belonged, and her overseer, whose name was Hanson. Beardsley's enmity was purely personal; but with Hanson it was a matter of dollars and cents. The captain took Marcy to sea against his will, because he wanted to persecute his mother; while the overseer was working for the large reward Colonel Shelby had promised to give if Hanson would bring him positive information that Mrs. Gray was in reality the Union woman she was supposed to be, and that she had money concealed in her house. When

Sailor Jack had been at home long enough to find out how and by whom his mother was being persecuted, he told Aleck Webster about it, and the latter stopped it so quickly that everybody was astonished, and the guilty ones alarmed.

While Marcy was gone to take his brother out to the fleet, a very strange and startling incident happened on Mrs. Gray's plantation. Sailor Jack had predicted that the morning was coming when the negroes would not hear the horn blown to call them to their work, for the very good reason that there would be no overseer on the plantation to blow it, and his prediction had been verified. One dark night, just after Marcy and Jack set out on their perilous voyage, a band of masked men came to the plantation, took Hanson, the overseer, out of his house and carried him away. Where he was now none could tell for certain; but Marcy had heard from Aleck Webster that he had been "turned loose with orders never to show his face in the settlement again." Perhaps he had gone for good; but the fear that he might some day come back to trouble her caused Mrs. Gray no little uneasiness.

While every one else in the settlement was so excited and uneasy, and wondering what other mysterious things were about to happen, Marcy Gray was as calm as a summer's morning. To use his own words, he was "getting ready to settle down to business." The overseer being gone, there was no one but himself left to manage the plantation ; and he was glad to have the responsibility, for it gave him something to occupy his mind. When Aleck Webster told him that Hanson would not trouble him or his mother any more, he had also given him the assurance that he would never again be obliged to go to sea as Captain Beardsley's pilot. There was a world of comfort in the words, and Marcy hoped the man knew what he was promising when he uttered them ; but he thought he would feel more at his ease when he saw Beardsley's schooner at her moorings in the creek, and Beardsley himself at work in the field with his negroes.

On the morning of the day on which our story begins, the leaden clouds hung low, and the piercing wind which came off the Sound, bringing with it occasional dashes of rain, and scattering the few remaining leaves the early frosts had left upon the trees, seemed to cause no little discomfort to the young horseman who was riding along the road that led from his father's plantation to the village of Nashville. He had turned the collar of his heavy coat about his ears, dropped the reins upon his horse's neck, and buried his hands deep in his pockets. It was Tom Allison, the boastful young rebel whom Marcy Gray, then the newly appointed pilot of Captain Beardsley's privateer schooner, had once rebuked and silenced in the presence of a room full of secession sympathizers.

Allison was on his way to the post-office after the mail, and to listen to any little items of news which the idlers he was sure to find there might have picked up since he last saw them; and, as he rode, he thought about some things that puzzled him. He went over the events that had taken place along the coast during the last few months, beginning with the bombardment and capture of forts Hatteras and Clark, and ending with the Confederate occupation of Roanoke Island, and he was obliged to confess to himself that things did not look as bright for the South now, as they did after that glorious victory at Bull Run. Finally, he thought of the incidents that had lately happened in his own neighborhood, and in which some of his acquaintances and friends were personally interested. In fact he was deeply interested in them himself, and would have given any article of value he owned for the privilege of holding five minutes' conversation with some one who could tell him what had become of Jack Gray and Hanson.

"I can tell you in few words what I think about it," said Tom to himself. "There's more behind the disappearance of those two fellows than the men folks around here are willing to acknowledge. That's what *I* think. I notice that Shelby, Dillon, and the postmaster don't talk quite as much nor as loudly as they did before Hanson and Gray left so suddenly, and when I ask father what he thinks of it, he shakes his head and looks troubled; and that's all I can get out of him.

They are frightened, the whole gang of them; and to my mind we would all be safer if that Gray family was burned out and driven from the country. They know everything that is said about them, and it beats me where they get the news. The settlement is full of traitors, and probably I meet and speak to some of them every day."

While Allison was talking to himself in this strain his nag brought him to a cross-road, and almost to the side of another horseman who, like himself, was riding in the direction of Nashville. The two pulled their collars down from their faces, raised their hats, and looked at each other; and then Allison was surprised to find that he was in the company of Lon Beardsley, the privateersman and blockade runner. There had been a time when he would not have noticed the man any further than to give him a slight nod or a civil word or two, for he was the son of a wealthy planter, and thought himself better than one who had often been seen working in the field with his negroes. There used to be a wide gulf between such people in the South. For example, N. B. Forrest was not recognized socially while he was a civilian and made the most of his money by buying and selling men and women whose skins were darker than his own, but *General* Forrest, the man who massacred Union soldiers at Fort Pillow and took their commander, Major Bradford, into the woods and shot him after he had surrendered himself a prisoner of war, was held in high esteem. To Allison's mind, Captain Beardsley, who had smelled Yankee powder and run two cargoes of contraband goods safely through the blockade, was more worthy of respect than Lon Beardsley the smuggler, and he was willing to gain his good-will now if he could, for he believed the captain had it in his power to punish Marcy Gray—the boy who had dared to taunt Allison with being a coward because he did not shoulder a musket and go into the army.

"Why, captain, I thought you were miles away and making money hand over fist by running the blockade," said Allison, with an awkward flourish which was intended for a military salute. "I hope when you go out again you will be sure and take that so-called pilot of yours with you, for we don't want him hanging about here any longer. I don't believe his arm is so very badly hurt, and neither does anybody else. I am glad to see you back safe and sound. When did you get in?"

"In where?" said Beardsley gruffly; and then the boy saw that he was in bad humor about something.

"Into Newbern, of course. And when and how did you come up here?"

"I came up last night in the *Hattie*."

"You did? You don't mean to say that your schooner is in the creek, do you?" exclaimed Allison, who was surprised to hear it. "You did not do a very bright thing when you brought her there, for the first thing you know the Yankees will send some of their gunboats up to the island, and then you will be blocked in. I should think you would have stayed at Newbern, where you could run out and in as often as you felt like it."

"Don't you reckon I know my own affairs better'n you do?" snapped Beardsley. "I didn't quit a money-making business of my own free will and come home because I wanted to, but because I couldn't help myself."

"I don't understand you," answered Tom, who was all in the dark. "Our authorities didn't send you home, of course, and the Yankees couldn't. If your schooner is in good shape——"

"The *Hattie* is all right," said Beardsley, with a ring of pride in his tones. "She has been in some tight places, I can tell you, and if she hadn't showed herself to be just the sweetest, fastest thing of her inches that ever floated, I wouldn't be here talking to you now. And the Yankees did send me home too; or their friends did, which amounts to the same thing. What's become of Mrs. Gray's overseer, Hanson?"

"I can't make out what you mean, when you say that the Yankees or their friends sent you home," replied Allison. "We haven't heard of their making many captures along the coast lately."

"I dunno as it makes any sort of odds to me what you didn't hear. I know what I am talking about. What's happened to Hanson, I ask you?"

"How do you suppose I can tell? And if you only came home last night, how does it come that you know anything has happened to him?" inquired Tom, who thought he saw a chance to learn something. "I haven't seen that man Hanson for a long time."

"Nor me; but I know well enough that there's something went wrong with him," said Beardsley very decidedly. "I know that he was took out of his house at dead of night by a gang of men, that he was carried away, and that nobody ain't likely to see hide nor hair of him any more."

"That news is old, and I don't see why you should assume so mysterious an air in speaking of it," said Tom. "Your daughter has had time enough to tell you all about it since you came home."

"But I heard about it before I left Newbern."

"You did! Who told you?"

"Well, I heard all about it."

"What if you did? I don't see how Hanson's disappearance could interfere with your blockade-running."

"Mebbe you don't, but I do. If you had been in my place, and somebody had sent you a letter saying that if you didn't quit business and come home at once, some of your buildings would be burned up, what would you think then? Do you reckon it would bust up your blockade running or not?"

"Do you pretend to tell me that you received such a letter?" cried Allison, who could scarcely believe his ears.

"That is just what I pretend to tell you—no less," answered the captain, tapping the breast of his coat as if to say that he could prove his words if necessary.

"Why—why, who could have sent it to you? Who do you think wrote it?"

"You tell. I don't know the first thing about it; I wish I did. I am here now, and if I could only put my finger on the chap who caused me all this bother, I'd fix him."

"Would you bushwhack him?" inquired Allison, wondering if there was any way in which he could prevail upon Beardsley to show him that letter.

"No; but I would put the authorities on to him tolerable sudden and have him forced into the army. Because why, I am scart of that chap myself. He's hanging around here now, waiting for a good chance to do some more meanness."

"You don't say!" exclaimed Tom, growing frightened. "He ought to be got rid of. But who is he? Is there any one about here that you know of who has reason to be down on you? Any one besides the Grays, I mean?"

Beardsley dropped his reins, pulled the collar of his coat down from his face with both hands, and looked hard at his companion.

"Why, of course the Grays are down on you heavy, and all your friends and mine know it," continued Tom. "You know it, don't you?"

"There, now!" exclaimed the captain, rearranging his collar and picking up his reins again. "I never once thought of blaming it on that there Marcy."

"I don't blame it on him, and I don't want you to think so for a moment," said Tom, who had not yet arrived at the point of being confidential with Beardsley. "I never hinted that Marcy wrote the letter; but just look at the way the thing stands. A man who knows as much about this coast as you do never wanted a pilot, but you did want to marry Mrs. Gray's plantation; and when she gave you to understand that she wouldn't have it so——"

"See here, young feller, you're going too fur," cried the captain, pulling his collar down with one hand and shaking his whip threateningly at Allison with the other. "You don't know what you're talking about, and I won't hear another word of it."

"What's the use of getting mad because somebody tells you the truth?" demanded Tom. "Every one says so, and what every one holds to can't be so very far wrong. You know you don't need a pilot, and I know it too. You have nothing against Marcy Gray personally——"

"I ain't, hey?" shouted the angry captain.

"He's just the biggest kind of a traitor that ever——"

"That isn't what I am trying to get at, and you know it," interrupted Tom. "You want to hurt him and his mother by taking him to sea against his will and hers. Now if you were in Marcy's place, and knew all these things, as he most likely does, and you saw a good chance to get even with the man who was persecuting you, would you let that chance slip? I reckon not."

"But if it's Marcy who has been a-pestering of me, how can I prove it on him?" inquired Beardsley, who was as angry as Allison had ever known him to be.

"Let me see the letter," replied Tom.

"No, I reckon not. What do you want to see it fur?"

"I can tell you whether or not Marcy Gray wrote it, for I know his hand as well as I know my own."

Beardsley hesitated. Ever since the morning he took the letter in question from the office in Newbern, he had been burning with anxiety and impatience to find out whom he had to thank for sending it to him, and he was now on his way to call upon his friends Shelby and Dillon to see if they could not put him on the track of the writer. He wanted to ask them what they thought of the whole miserable business any way, and did not care to show the letter until he heard what they had to say about it.

"I know the handwriting of every man and boy in this settlement," continued Allison, "and if I can't tell you who wrote it no one can; not even the postmaster."

This settled the matter, to Allison's satisfaction. The captain opened his coat and drew out the letter, which was written in a hand that was plainly disguised, for the same characters were not formed twice alike. It was not very long, but it was to the point, and ran as follows:

> This is to inform you that you have spent jes time enough in persecuting Union folks in this settlement on account of them not beleeving as you rebbels do, and likewise time enough in cheeting the goverment by bringing contraband goods through the blockade. And this is to inform you that if you do not immediately upon resep of this stop your disloyal practices and come home at once, you will not find as many buildings standing, when you do come, as you have got standing now at this present time of writing. And this is likewise to inform

you that the first proof that we mean jes what we say, you will get in a letter from your folks, who will tell you that a letter something like this was found on the front gallery of your house on a certain night, and that a lot of dry weeds and stuff was likewise found piled against the back of said house. Proof number 2 will be in the same letter, which will tell you that Mrs. Gray's overseer has been toted away by armed men, and that he won't never be seen in this settlement again. For every day you delay in coming home immediately after this letter has had time to reach you in Newbern, you will loose a building of some kind or sort, beginning with the house you live in. This is from those who believe in defending the wemen and children you rebbels are making war on, and so we sign ourselves, THE PERTECTORS OF THE HELPLESS.

"Marcy Gray never had a hand in getting up this letter, more's the pity," thought Tom, as he again ran his eye over the plainly written lines in the hope of finding something that would give him an excuse for saying that Marcy did write it. "Look at the spelling and the bungling language! Marcy couldn't do that if he tried."

"Well, what do you reckon you make of it?" demanded the captain.

"It's perfectly scandalous—the most outrageous thing I ever heard of!" exclaimed Allison. "Just think of the impudence this fellow shows in ordering you—ordering, I say——"

"Oh, there's more'n one feller mixed up in it," said Beardsley, with a groan.

"Perhaps there is, and then again, perhaps there isn't," replied Tom. "Couldn't I write a letter and sign a hundred names to it, if I wanted to? I say it is a burning shame that good and loyal Confederates should submit to be ordered about in this way, and you were foolish for paying the least attention to it. You ought to have gone on with your business and come home when you got ready."

Beardsley turned down the collar of his coat, threw his left leg over the horn of his saddle, and shook his whip at Allison as if he were about to say something impressive.

CHAPTER II.

ALLISON IS SURPRISED.

"OH, I mean it," said Tom, and one would have thought by the way he shook his head and frowned and made his riding-whip whistle through the air, that it would be useless for anybody to try to order *him* around. "Just try me and see; that's all."

"And if you had been in my place you wouldn't have come home till you got good and ready?" said Beardsley.

"You bet I wouldn't. I wouldn't be guilty of setting such an example to the timid ones at home. This is the time when every man——"

"How many buildings have you got in this part of the country?" inquired the captain, shutting his right eye and laying his finger by the side of his nose. "Have you forgot the men who took Hanson away in the night, and piled up those weeds and stuff up agin my house?"

"Well, that's so; but still I don't think they would have been bold enough to do anything to you. You are a wealthy planter, while Hanson was nothing but a common overseer, without a friend or relative in the world so far as any one knows. Did you receive the proofs this letter speaks of?"

"You bet I did," answered Beardsley, shaking his whip in the air. "My daughter got old Miss Brown to write to me just as them Pertectors of the Helpless—dog-gone the last one of 'em—said she would, and sure as you live she found another letter on the gallery, and a whole passel of stuff piled up agin the house, ready to be touched off with a match; and the very same night Mrs. Gray's overseer was carried away. When she told me all them things and begged me to come home I thought I had best come. But I don't mean to let the matter drop here, tell your folks. The fellers who wrote that letter must be hunted down and whopped like they was niggers. Did Marcy Gray do it?"

"I can't swear that he didn't," replied Tom guardedly. "But if he did, he disguised his hand so that I do not recognize it. I can't find the first letter in it that looks like Marcy's work."

Beardsley seemed disappointed as he returned the letter to his pocket and buttoned his coat, and Tom Allison certainly was. Two or three times it was on the end of his tongue to declare that Marcy was the guilty one, but he lacked the courage. He was afraid of the mysterious men who had begun to carry things with so high a hand in the settlement, for he did not know how soon they might turn their attention to him or to his father's property.

"Marcy is quite mean enough to do a thing of that kind, hoping to bring you home so that you would not take him to sea any more," said Tom, who could not resist the longing he had to say something that would lead Beardsley to declare war upon the boy who had served as his pilot. "He may have written the letter, but he could not have piled that light stuff against your house, for he was not at home when the thing happened. Has it struck you that the work must have been done by some one who belongs on your plantation? Your dogs would have raised a terrible racket if a stranger——"

"No, it wasn't," said Beardsley earnestly. "The dogs made furse enough that night to wake up everybody in Nashville; but they didn't none of 'em do nothing, and that shows that they were afraid of the crowd that was there. My folks was that scared that they dassent none of 'em look out of the winder; but the next morning the letter that was put on the gallery and the stuff to burn the house was both there."

"It's very strange that I never heard of it before," said Tom, who could not help telling himself that the recital made him feel very uncomfortable. "It's just awful that things like these can go on in the settlement and nobody be punished for them."

"Well, it ain't so strange that you didn't hear of it, when you bear in mind that my folks didn't say much about it for fear that they might speak to the wrong person," said

Beardsley. "I reckon it was done by the same fellers who took Hanson away to the swamp. Ain't nary idee who they were, have you?"

"Nary an idea. I wish I had, so that I could expose them. Why, just think of it, captain! If things like these are allowed to go on, who is safe? How do we know but you or I may be marched off in the same way some dark night?"

"I don't know it, and that's just what's a-troubling of me," said Beardsley, groaning again and rubbing his gloved hands nervously together. "Such doings is too shameful to be bore any longer. There's a heap of traitors right here amongst us, and I don't see how we are going to get shet of 'em."

"That's the thought that was running in my mind when I met you," said Tom savagely. "I know who some of the traitors are, but the truth is, they are so cunning you can't prove the first thing against them. There's that Marcy Gray for one."

"Say!" whispered Beardsley, reining his horse a little closer to Tom's and tapping the boy's shoulder with his riding-whip, "you have hit the very identical idee I have had in my mind for a long time. If Marcy ain't a traitor, what's him and his mother keeping that money of theirn stowed away so quiet for?"

"Say!" whispered Allison in his turn, at the same time laying the handle of his own whip lightly upon the captain's knee, "that is something I have thought about more times than I can remember. If they haven't got money, and plenty of it, hidden somewhere, I am mistaken. You know that before Marcy came home from school his mother made a good many trips to Richmond, Newbern, and Wilmington; and everybody says those trips were not made solely for the purpose of buying supplies for the plantation."

"I know it," assented Beardsley.

"When Mrs. Gray came home she made a big show of parading all her niggers in bran' new suits of clothes," continued Allison. "But she did not have to go to three cities to buy the cloth those clothes were made of, did she? She's got money, and I am sure of it."

"I know it," said Beardsley again. "I tried my best to make Marcy say so, but he was too sharp for me. You see his share of the prize-money the *Hollins* sold for amounted to seventeen hunderd dollars."

"Great Moses!" ejaculated Tom. "What a plum for that traitor to put into his pocket! I wish I had it. But he told me he was to get eight hundred and fifty dollars."

"P'raps he did, for that was what the foremast hands got; but I promised to give Marcy more for acting as pilot and I done it, consarn my fule pictur'! I wanted to get on the blind side of him, so't he would sorter confide in me for a friend, don't you see? But I didn't make it. That boy might have cleared five thousand dollars if he had took out a venture the first time we run the blockade, but he wouldn't do it for fear he might lose the money. He said he might want to use them seventeen hunderd before the war was over."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Tom.

"That's what I thought," replied Beardsley.

"Seventeen hundred dollars are not a drop in the bucket to the sum he and his mother have on hand at this moment, and I'll bet on it," added Tom. "They've got thousands, and I wish I could have the handling of some of it."

That was what Captain Beardsley wished; but the trouble was he did not know where the money was concealed, or just how to go to work to get hold of it. He had a partly formed plan in his head, but he did not think that it would be quite safe to let Tom into the secret of it. At any rate, he would tell all his news first, and think about that afterward.

"That boy Marcy is a plum dunce to act the way he is doing now," said the captain, after a little pause. "If he would go into our navy, and this war should happen to last a year or so longer, he would make a big officer of himself."

"It won't last six months longer," said Allison confidently. "The Yankees can't stand more than one Bull Run drubbing. But tell me honestly, captain: Did Gray really show pluck on the night he got that broken arm?"

"He did for a fact," replied Beardsley. "He stood up to the rack like a man, and took the schooner through the inlet with that arm hanging by his side as limp as a dish-rag. I'm free to say it, though I ain't no friend of his'n."

"I am sorry you said it in the letters you wrote home to Shelby and Dillon. I wish that splinter, or whatever it was, had hit his head instead of his arm, for he carries himself altogether too stiff-legged on the strength of it. If he had whipped the whole Yankee fleet he could not throw on more airs. But why do you say he could win promotion by enlisting in *our* navy? Do you think he would go among the Federals if he wasn't afraid?"

"That's where he would go if it wasn't for his mother. It's where his brother Jack is at this minute."

"Captain," said Tom impressively, "you and I ought to be the very best of friends, for we think alike on a good many points. Somebody, I don't know who it was, gave it out through the settlement that Jack Gray went to Newbern to ship on a Confederate iron-clad;

but I didn't believe it, and I don't think so now. If he and Marcy wanted to go to Newbern they would have gone by rail, wouldn't they? Instead of that they went in Marcy's schooner."

"I don't care what anybody has give out or what anybody thinks," said Beardsley doggedly. "I know what I know, and believe what I have seen with my own two eyes, don't I? While I was standing into Crooked Inlet on my way—say! I don't know as I had best tell you what I seen with my own two eyes."

"Why not?" demanded Allison, who was sure he was about to hear some exciting news. "You have already told me more than you had any business to tell, if you don't think I can keep a secret."

"Well, that there is a fact. Look a-here. I aint said a word to nobody about this, and you mustn't let on that I told you; but while I was running into Crooked Inlet on my way home from the last trip I made to Nassau, I didn't see the steam launch that I was afraid might be waiting there for me, but I did see Marcy Gray's schooner."

"Isn't that what I said?" exclaimed Tom gleefully. "What was Marcy Gray's schooner doing outside, and in the night-time, too?"

"Hold on till I tell you how it was," replied the captain. "The first thing I see was that the schooner had been disguised, but that didn't by no means fool your uncle Lon. Them two boys, Marcy and Jack, had towed her through the inlet with their skiff and were just about to get aboard again and make sail, when I run on to 'em in the dark. I was that scared to see 'em that I couldn't move from my tracks, for a minute or two. I thought the Yankees had me sure."

"It almost takes my breath to have my suspicions confirmed in this way," said Tom. "Did you watch them to see where they went?"

"Listen at the fule!" exclaimed the captain, in a tone of disgust. "Not much, I didn't watch them boys. I had enough to do to mind my own business; and knowing what brung them outside at that time of night, didn't I know where they had started for without watching 'em? They didn't go nigh

Newbern. They went straight out to the Yankee fleet, and there's where Jack Gray is, while me and you are riding along this road."

"Captain, I wouldn't have missed seeing you this morning for a bushel of money," declared Tom, whose first impulse was to whip up his horse and carry the joyful news to Nashville. "I've got a hold on Marcy Gray now that I shan't be slow to use."

"What are you going to do?" asked Beardsley anxiously.

"I'll let him know who he called a coward before a whole post-office full of people," said Allison savagely. "He will take that word back on his knees and do his best to make a friend of me, or I'll——"

"There, now!" cried Beardsley; and the tone in which he uttered the words was quite as savage as Tom's. "I knew well enough that I had no call to tell you all them things without first speaking to Shelby and Dillon about them."

"Of course I shall consult you, before doing or saying anything to Marcy," replied Tom, wishing he had not been so quick to speak the thoughts that were in his mind. "I don't want you to think that I am going to take these matters out of your hands, for I don't mean to do anything of the sort."

"You had better not. You are nothing but a boy, and you would be sure to make a mess of the whole thing if you tried it. Me and Shelby will deal with Marcy and his mother."

"I shall be satisfied, so long as you do something to him that he can feel. All I ask is to be around when it is done, so that I can see it. But you will have to be careful, captain. There are some about here who believe that the Grays are the best kind of Confederates."

"What makes them believe that when me and you know it aint so?"

"It's the way they worked things; and it was about the slickest scheme I ever heard of," replied Allison. "Why, captain, they ran down the river past Plymouth and Roanoke, with our flag flying from the *Fairy Belle's* masthead."

"Of all the imperdence! Where did they get a flag of our'n?"

"No one knows, unless Jack got it off the smuggler *West Wind*, that he piloted into Newbern. Anyhow he got it, and kept it hung upon the wall of his mother's house in plain sight of all who went there.''

''It was nothing but a cheat and a swindle, I tell you,'' shouted the captain. ''Both them boys is Union, and their mother is too. I'll fix 'em!''

''I say again that you had better be careful,'' cautioned Tom. ''If it turns out that they are in favor of the South, you will burn your fingers if you touch them; and if they are Union, they have friends to watch over and see that no harm comes to them. Have you forgotten the men who carried Hanson away in the night?''

''No, I ain't; and that's what makes me so mad. We-uns about here can't do nothing with that money—— Say! mebbe I could tell you something else if you'll promise never to let on about it.''

''All right. I never will,'' answered Allison, who was becoming impatient to hear all the man had on his mind. Nashville was in plain sight now, and of course there could be no more talking of this sort done after they got there. "Hold up a bit. Don't let your horse walk so fast."

"What I thought of saying to you is this," said Beardsley, once more sinking his voice to a whisper. "We-uns who live about here can't do nothing by ourselves, but we can hint—just hint, I say—to some outsiders that there's a pile of money in that there house of Mrs. Gray's that's to be had for the taking."

"Go on," said Tom, when Beardsley stopped and looked at him. "I am listening, but I don't catch your meaning."

"I could easy find half a dozen fellers right around here who would be up and doing mighty sudden if I should say that much in their private ears," continued the captain. "But mebbe that plan wouldn't work. I can't tell till I hear what Shelby thinks about it. But if it don't work, we might put the Richmond officers onto them."

"What good would that do? If there is money in Mrs. Gray's house the Richmond authorities have no right to touch it."

"Aint they, now!" chuckled Beardsley.

"Don't the law say that we-uns mustn't pay no debts to the Yankees, but must turn the money over to the fellers at Richmond?"

"But I am afraid Mrs. Gray doesn't owe any money to the Yankees."

"What's the odds whether you think so or not?" said the captain earnestly. "We can hint that she does, can't we? And can't we hint furder, that instead of turning that money over, like the law says she must do, she is keeping it hid for her own use!"

"Then why not make a sure thing of it by putting the government officers on the scent the first thing?"

"Because they won't divide, the officers won't. Don't you see? The other fellers will."

Tom Allison was astonished now, and no mistake. For a minute or two he looked hard at Beardsley, but he couldn't speak.

"What do you stare at me that-a-way for?" demanded the captain. "I don't see nothing so very amazing in what I said. Didn't you tell me a minute ago that you would like mighty well to have the handling of some of that there money?"

"Of course I did, and I say so yet; but I wouldn't dare touch it if it was got in that way. Don't misunderstand me now," said Allison, when he saw Beardsley gather up his reins and change his riding-whip to his right hand as if he were about to go on and leave Tom behind. "If you think it would be quite safe——"

"What other way is there to get it?" snarled Beardsley. "I wasn't joking. These here aint no times for joking, and I meant every word I said. Why aint it safe? The folks in the settlement are mostly our friends, and even if they knew that some of the money went into our pockets, they wouldn't say nothing about it."

"They would know it, and my father would say something to me, I bet you. But mind you," said Tom, as the two turned their horses toward the hitching-rack that stood across the street from the post-office, "if you and your friends think it can be done, I say go ahead and good luck to you. And if you make a success of it, as I hope you will, no one will hear from me that I knew a thing about it."

"And you won't let on about the other things I have told you?" said the captain, as he dismounted and spread a blanket over his horse. "I don't reckon I had oughter said so much. Mebbe Shelby won't like it."

"Will you tell me what he says after you have had a talk with him? Then you may depend upon me to keep a still tongue in my head. As for Shelby, I don't care whether he likes it or not. It is none of his business. I know, and have known for a long time, that he and his ring have some things in hand that they won't let me hear of, and I am as warm a friend to the South as they dare be, and just as ready to help her."

"But you see you're a boy; and some men don't like to take boys into their secrets," replied Beardsley.

"I know I am a boy, but all the same I am a wild horse in the cane and hard to curry. If Shelby and his gang don't pay a little more attention to me I will make them wish they had ; and if Beardsley don't keep me posted in his plans, I'll knock them into the middle of next week. I'll find means to get Hanson's abductors after him. By George! That's an idea, and I'll think it over as I ride home."

So saying Tom Allison hitched his horse to one of the pins in the rack and followed Beardsley across the street toward the post-office.

CHAPTER III.

THE NEIGHBORHOOD GOSSIP.

THE streets of Nashville were almost deserted, for the cold wind, aided by the driving rain that was falling steadily, had forced all the idlers to seek comfort within doors. The post-office was full of them, and when the captain walked in with Allison at his heels they greeted him boisterously, and asked more questions in a minute than he could answer in ten. First and foremost they wanted to know why Beardsley had come home so unexpectedly, but that was a matter he did not care to say much about. All they could get from him was that he had some important business to attend to.

"But of course you are going back again," said one. "I would if I had such a chance to make money as you have got. But perhaps you are rich enough already."

"Well, no; I don't reckon I'll run the blockade any more," replied the captain. "My schooner is safe and sound now and I want to keep her that way. The Yankees are getting tolerable thick outside, and I don't care to have them run me down some dark night and slap me into one of their prisons."

There were at least a dozen persons in the post-office, besides Tom Allison, who knew that Beardsley had other and better reasons for quitting the profitable business in which he had been engaged, and three of them were Shelby, Dillon, and the postmaster. These men knew by the captain's manner, as well as by the way he looked at them now and then, that he had something of importance on his mind, and they left the store one after another, expecting Beardsley to follow and join them as soon as he could do so without arousing suspicion. A fourth man was Aleck Webster, who leaned carelessly against one of the counters and listened to what the captain had to say, although he did not seem to pay much attention to it. If Aleck had been so disposed he could have told Beardsley who wrote the letter that broke up his blockade running and brought him home so suddenly, and so could several other Union men who were in the office on this particular morning. They went there every day to hear their doings discussed; and it gave them no little satisfaction to learn that they had aroused a feeling of uneasiness and insecurity among the citizens which grew more intense as the days went by and nothing was heard from Hanson. Although Tom Allison knew nothing about the letter that had been left on Beardsley's porch until the latter told him, there were many in the settlement who knew about it and were wondering who could have put it there. The captain's negroes were the first to find it out, and Mrs. Brown, the neighborhood gossip who read the letter for Beardsley's daughter, was the second; and among them all they had managed to spread the story considerably.

Tom Allison was like Captain Beardsley in one respect—he could not keep a secret any longer than it took him to find some congenial spirit who was willing to share it with him. He was eager to tell all he knew, and sometimes he told a good deal more; consequently, the first thing he did after Beardsley received his mail and left the office to find the three men who had gone out a while before, was to give his particular friend and crony Mark Goodwin, a swaggering, boastful young rebel like himself, a wink and a nod that brought him across to Tom's side of the store.

"What is it, old fellow?" whispered Mark. "Your face is full of news."

"And so is my head," replied Tom. "I am loaded clear to the muzzle, and anxious to shoot myself off at *your* head. I am going to ride down to exchange a few yarns with Mrs. Brown; will you go along?"

"What's the use?" exclaimed Mark, looking through the moist windows into the street. "You won't get anything but lies out of her. And just see how it rains!"

"It doesn't rain to hurt anything, and we can't talk here," said Tom. "I don't care whether Mrs. Brown tells me the truth or not, so long as she will aid me in spreading a few items of news that came to my ears this morning. Better go, for I promise that I will surprise you. You know I rode down with Beardsley."

"And I rather wondered at it. I can remember when you used to speak of him in a way that was anything but complimentary. Did he tell you what brought him home?" said Mark, in a whisper. "Come along then. I am ready to be surprised."

The two boys mounted their horses and rode away through the driving rain, and as they rode, Tom Allison electrified his friend by making a clean breast of everything Beardsley had told him, and which he had promised to keep to himself; and observing that Mark was interested and excited by the narrative, Tom added to it a few details of his own invention. He declared that Hanson had told Beardsley, in confidence, that Mrs. Gray owed a big pile of money to Northern men, and instead of turning it over to the government, as the law provided, she was keeping it for her own use.

"And how does it come that Hanson could learn so much of Mrs. Gray's private affairs?" demanded Mark. "He didn't live in the house, but in the quarter with the niggers."

"Probably some of the house servants posted him," answered Tom. "You know that prying darkies sometimes find out a heap of things."

"That's so," assented Mark. "Tom, you have told me great news—Mrs. Gray with a gold mine hidden somewhere in her house, and Marcy taking his brother Jack out to the Yankee fleet to give him a chance to enlist under the old flag! What are we coming to? What are you going to do about it? You must have some plan in your head, or you wouldn't be going to see Mrs. Brown. You had better be careful what you say in the presence of that old witch, or she may get you into trouble."

"That is the very thing I wanted to talk to you about," replied Tom. "What do you think we ought to do? I don't know whether I have the straight of the story or not, but I am sure Mrs. Brown has, for Beardsley probably told her all about it as soon as he got home last night. That man can't keep a thing to himself to save his life. I thought it might be a good idea to see what Mrs. Brown thinks about it, and to ask her if there is any truth in the report that a band of men has been got together to rob Mrs. Gray's house."

"I will tell you one thing confidentially," said Mark. "If that part of the story isn't true, a few wags of Mrs. Brown's tongue will make it true. There are dozens of men right here in this country, and you and I are acquainted with some of them, who would jump down on that house this very night if they were sure they could make anything by it."

"I know that, but I don't care; do you? I always did despise those Grays, and now that they have shown themselves to be traitors, I say let them suffer for it. You heard Marcy tell me to put a uniform on before I presumed to speak to him again, didn't you?"

"Yes; and I heard his brother Jack call you a stay-at-home blow-hard. I looked for you to tackle the pair of them the moment they insulted you; but you surprised me and all the rest of your friends by keeping perfectly still," observed Mark, who knew well enough that Tom lacked the courage to "tackle" the brothers, either of whom could have tossed him half-way across the post-office without very much trouble.

"I was biding my time," replied Allison, making his riding-whip whistle viciously through the air just above his horse's ears. "It has come now, and if Marcy Gray doesn't take that insulting word back as publicly as he gave it to me——"

"Oh, you needn't look for him to do that. Marcy isn't that sort of a fellow."

"He'll wish he was that sort before I am done with him," said Tom, with spiteful emphasis. "That's one reason why I am going to see Mrs. Brown. I want her to spread it around that Marcy took Jack out to the blockading fleet."

"She is just the one to do it," said Mark, with a laugh. "And the way to make her go about it as though she meant business is to tell her your story under a pledge of secrecy."

"And there is another matter that I want to speak to you about," continued Tom. "What scheme have Shelby and Dillon and the postmaster and your father and mine got in hand that they take so much pains to keep from us boys?"

"I wish I knew," answered Mark, whose face showed that his companion's words had made him angry. "They talk about something or other as often as they get together, and if I take a step in their direction they either send me about my business, or stop talking. And I tell you I don't like to be treated that way."

"That is just the way they treat me, and I don't like it either," said Tom. "More than that, I won't stand it."

"I don't see how you are going to help yourself."

"Perhaps you don't, but I think I do. Beardsley belongs to the ring, of course, and if he doesn't keep me posted in all their plans, I'll go to work to upset them."

"Why, Tom, are you crazy?" exclaimed Mark, who had never been more amazed.

"No; but I am mad clear through. I am not willing to go into the army unless I can have an office of some kind, but I am eager to fight traitors here at home; and if those men won't give me a chance to help them, I shall fight on my own hook."

"But how can you? And how will you go to work to upset their plans when you don't know what they are? You take a friend's advice and behave yourself. Why, Tom, I wouldn't willingly incur the enmity of the Union men about here for all the money there is in the State. They are too desperate a lot for me to fool with. Nobody knows for certain who they are, and that makes them all the more dangerous."

About this time the boys dismounted in front of Mrs. Brown's humble abode—a small log-cabin which Beardsley had built for her in the edge of a briar patch on his own plantation. That was the only neighborly act that anybody ever knew the captain to be guilty of; but then it was not entirely unselfish on his part. Beardsley received important letters now and then. He was not good at reading all sorts of writing, and when he came upon a sentence that he could not master, it was little trouble for him to run over to Mrs.

Brown's cabin and ask her to decipher it for him. And—it is a remarkable thing to tell, but it is the truth—the contents of those letters were safe with Mrs. Brown. She would tell any and every thing else that came to her knowledge, no matter how it might hurt somebody, but who Beardsley's correspondents were and what they wrote about, no one could learn from her.

Having sheltered their horses in some fashion behind the cabin, the boys opened the door without knocking, and went in. There were two persons in the single room the cabin contained—a little, dried-up woman who sat in a low rocking-chair in front of the fire with a dingy snuff-stick between her toothless gums, and one of Beardsley's negro girls who had come over to "slick up things."

"How do you find yourself this fine morning, mother?" said Tom familiarly. "We thought we would drop in to warm by your comfortable blaze, and see if you are in need of any little things we can get for you. By the way," he added, putting his hand into his pocket, "it's a long time since I gave anything toward buying a jar of snuff. Take that till I come again."

"I see the captain has returned; and quite unexpectedly, too, I am told," said Mark, pulling off his dripping overcoat and hanging it upon a wooden peg in the chimney-corner. "I wish he might find the man who wrote him that threatening letter and broke up his business. I am sure he would make it warm for him."

"Every one of them triflin' hounds had oughter have a hickory wore out on their bare backs," said the old woman, in tones which sounded so nearly like the snarl of some wild animal that Tom Allison shuddered, although he had often heard her speak that way before.

"Do you know who they are?"

"Of course she knows who they are," exclaimed Mark. "The question is, is she at liberty to tell."

"Mebbe I know, an' mebbe I don't," said the woman, with a contortion of her wrinkled face that was intended for a wink and a smile. "I aint one of them folks who tells all they know. I am a master-hand to keep things to myself when they are told to me for a secret."

"Everybody knows that, and it is the reason why everybody is so willing to trust you," said Tom; and seeing that he had not given the old woman quite enough to loosen her tongue, he turned to Mark and added: "I was sure we would forget it, we are so careless. We came away from your house without ever once thinking of that side of bacon we were going to bring to Mrs. Brown."

"I knew we had forgotten something," said Mark regretfully, "and sure's you live that's it. But it will keep till we come again, won't it, mother? Who did you say wrote that letter?"

"You're very good boys to be always thinkin' of a poor crippled body like me, who can't get about to hear a bit of news on account of the pesky rheumatiz that bothers me night *an'* day," whined the old woman. "Now when I was a bright, lively young gal——"

"Did I understand you to say that Jack Gray had something to do with the abduction of his mother's overseer?" interrupted Mark, who knew it would never do to let the old woman get started on the story of her girlhood. "You astonish me; you do for a fact!"

"I disremember that I have spoke Jack Gray's name at all sense you two have been here," said Mrs. Brown cautiously.

"But you did, though. Didn't she, Tom?"

"I thought so, certainly; and I told myself at the time, that I did not see how Jack could have had any hand in Hanson's taking off, for I have heard that he was not at home when the thing was done."

"No more he wasn't to hum. He was on his way to jine the Yankee navy, dog-gone him an' them," snapped the woman, whose tongue was fairly loosened now. "But he left them behine who works as well fur him when he aint to hum as when he is."

"We know that very well," said Tom, who was surprised to hear it, "but we don't know for certain who they are. Mark, don't you see that Mrs. Brown is looking for her pipe?"

Mark hadn't noticed it, but all the same he hunted around on the mantel until he found the well-blackened corn-cob, but he could not bring himself to light it. He filled the bowl with some natural leaf he saw in a box and handed it to the woman, who set it going with the aid of a live coal which she took from the hearth in her bony fingers.

"You two aint furgot the stranger who popped up in Nashville all on a sudden like, about the time that Jack Gray came hum from Newbern, have you?" continued the old woman, after she had assured herself by a few long, audible puffs that her pipe was well lighted. "Lemme see if I have disremembered his name. No; sounds to me like it was Aleck Webster."

"Don't know him," said Tom, in a disappointed tone.

"I don't know him either," chimed in Mark, "but I have seen him. You know old man Webster, Tom, who lives about six miles down the main road. Well, Aleck is his son."

"Now I do think, in my soul," exclaimed Allison, "things have come to a pretty pass when Crackers like those Websters can throw a settlement like this into a panic, and order prominent and wealthy planters like Captain Beardsley to quit business and come home on penalty of being burned out in case of disobedience."

"You're mighty right," said Mrs. Brown, who was pleased to hear the captain called a prominent and wealthy planter. "Sich trash aint no call to live on this broad 'arth. They're wuss than the niggers, an' a heap lower down."

"But have you any evidence against the Websters?" inquired Mark.

"I've got a plenty. In the fust place they don't say nothing; an' folks as don't say nothing these times ain't fitten to live. Now is the day when every man oughter come out an' show their colors," said the woman, quoting from Beardsley.

"That means Marcy Gray," said Tom. "I wish I could see a gang of armed men take him out of the house and carry him off."

"He mustn't be teched," said the woman very decidedly.

"Who mustn't—Marcy?" exclaimed Tom and Mark in a breath. "Who said so?

What's the reason he mustn't be touched? He's a traitor."

"I don't know whether he is or not; but he mustn't be pestered. Leastwise by folks living around here in the settlement."

Tom looked at Mark, and Mark looked about for a chair and sat down. Then they both looked at the old woman. This was something mysterious, and they wanted to have it explained.

"I aint got no more to say on that there p'int," said Mrs. Brown, her tone and manner showing that the question did not admit of argument. "He'll be teched fast enough when the time comes, Marcy Gray will, an' don't you furget to remember what I'm tellin' you. But them as goes for Marcy will be folks that can't be pestered by the men who toted Hanson off to the swamp."

"Ah! Now I see daylight," said Tom, with something that sounded like a sigh of relief. "I thought you meant that Marcy was to be left alone altogether for the reason that he was believed to be a good Confederate. And when these friends of ours, whoever they may be, go for him, I suppose they'll not neglect to look for the money that Mrs. Gray is known to have in her house?"

"I aint heared that anybody knows for sartin that the money is there," said Mrs. Brown. "Leastwise, they don't know it *yit.* There won't be nothing much done till that there is settled fur a fact."

"Then Marcy will never be molested," declared Tom, throwing a chip spitefully into the fire. "He can go out to the blockading fleet as often as he pleases and ship a dozen brothers in the Yankee navy if he wants to, and nothing will be done to him. If Jack Gray left men behind to work for him while he is at sea, Marcy must know who they are and where to find them, and he can set them on to Mark's father or mine whenever he feels like it. I'll touch him the first good chance I get, and don't you forget to remember *that.* He is a traitor, and I wouldn't let him alone if all the Captain Beardsleys in the country should say so. And how is any one to find out for certain that his mother has money concealed in her house? She isn't going to publish it to the world, is she?"

The longer Allison talked the more his anger rose, and when he got through he was stalking about the narrow limits of the cabin, shaking his fists over his head in the most frantic manner. The old woman waited patiently for him to sit down again, and then she took her pipe from her mouth long enough to say:

"Kelsey is out of a job jest now."

"That's no news. He's always that way. He won't work when he gets the chance. He would rather beg his living or steal it."

"I know that he's mighty shiftless an' triflin', but he's a tol'able overseer, Kelsey is, when he onct makes up his mine to do something," said the woman. "Now that Hanson has went off the Grays aint got nobody to boss the hands."

"The idea!" cried Tom, who began to "see daylight" once more. "Does Captain Beardsley labor under the delusion that Marcy Gray will hire that man Kelsey, who is next door to a fool, and allow him——"

"Yes, Kelsey is tol'able triflin', an' that there is a fact," interrupted the woman. "But he aint nobody's fule. He's as sly an ole fox as you can meet in a day's travel."

"Marcy Gray will not have him on the place, I tell you," said Tom. "And even if he should be dunce enough to hire him, how could Kelsey find out whether or not there was any money in the house? If the captain has anything against Kelsey, and wants him to disappear some dark night as Hanson did, he is taking the right course to bring it about. That's what will happen to Kelsey if he goes to work on that plantation, and I want you both to remember my words."

"And let me tell you another thing," added Mark. "No one man is going to find the hiding-place of that money if there is any about the house. When the building is down and the foundations are torn up, then it will be found, and not before."

"That there is a fact," observed the woman.

"Where do you think it is concealed, any way?" inquired Tom. "I had an idea that it might be buried in the garden."

"I am willing to bet my horse against your jack-knife that it isn't," replied Mark. "It is so close to the house that the family can keep an eye on all the approaches to it, and it is where fire can't touch it."

"Then it must be buried in the cellar," exclaimed Tom. "I declare! I believe you have hit the exact spot. I should like to be left alone in that place for about an hour with a shovel to work with. I would be rich when I came out."

"You jest keep away from that there suller," said the old woman sternly. "Don't go nigh the house, nary one of you."

The two boys elevated their eye-brows and looked at each other, and it was as much as half a minute before Mark Goodwin continued:

"You would be fooled if you looked anywhere but in the walls for it. So a shovel would be of no use to you. I have been in that cellar when Marcy and I were on better terms than we are now, and I know that the floor is laid in cement. It would be a job, I tell you, for a woman to dig it up and put it down again, and she couldn't do it so that the spot would not show itself to the first person who might happen to go in there."

"A woman!" exclaimed Allison.

"Yes, for a woman did the work," answered Mark, who could not have spoken with more confidence if he had been in Mrs. Gray's company on the night the thirty thousand dollars were concealed. "You know Marcy was not at home when his mother made those trips about the country."

"What of that? Didn't she take some of her old servants into her confidence?"

"No, sir. When people are trying to carry water on both shoulders as Mrs. Gray is, they don't let one hand know what the other does."

"And I believe," said Allison, getting upon his feet again and walking about the cabin, "that if somebody should go for Mrs. Gray's coachman in the right way, he would find out all about it. But I say, Mark, it's time for us to be riding along. What shall we bring you when we come again, mother? Snuff and smoking tobacco are always acceptable, I suppose?"

"And don't forget to say that you haven't seen either one of us for more than a week," chimed in Mark. "Doings of some sort are liable to happen in the settlement at any hour of the day or night, and we don't want our names mixed up with them. We shall attend strictly to our own business, and hope that those ruffians who carried Hanson away will do the same."

"I am mighty glad to hear you say that, and I don't want you to disremember what I have tole you," answered the old woman, with some earnestness. "You aint to go a-pesterin' of Marcy Gray an' his maw, kase there is folks about here who won't by no means take it kind of you if you do."

The boys promised that they would bear her warning in mind, but Tom Allison told himself that he thought he should do as he pleased about heeding it. He was not obliged to consult anybody's wishes, in dealing with such a traitor as Marcy Gray had shown himself to be. He turned his back to the fire while Mark was putting on his overcoat, and just then a gentle snore reminded him that there was one person in the cabin whom he had forgotten. It was the negro girl who, having cleared away the late breakfast dishes and put the little furniture there was in the room to rights, had drawn a chair to the table and fallen fast asleep with her head resting on her folded arms. Tom took one look at her, and then he and Mark went out. Neither of them said a word, until they had mounted their horses and ridden into the road, and then Mark inquired :

"What do you know now more than you did when you came here? All I have learned is that Beardsley is afraid of Marcy Gray, and don't want anything to happen to him, if he can help it, for fear that the blame would be laid at his door. I tell you, Tom Allison, as long as those men who carried Hanson away are at large, we have got to look out what we say and do. It's an awful state of affairs, but that is the way it looks to me."

That was the way it looked to Tom also; and as he could not say anything encouraging, he held his peace, and rode on with his eyes fastened upon the horn of his saddle.

CHAPTER IV.

VISITORS IN PLENTY.

ALTHOUGH we have said that Marcy Gray appeared to be as calm as a summer's morning, he was not so in reality. He had the most disquieting reflections for company during every one of his waking hours, and they troubled him so that he found it next to impossible to concentrate his mind on anything. On this particular morning he felt so very gloomy that he did not ride his filly to town, as was his usual custom, but sent old Morris and a mule instead. What was the use of going to the post-office through all that rain just to listen to the idle boasts of a few stay-at-home rebels who could not or would not tell him a single reliable item of news? He and his mother had been talking over the situation—it was what they always talked about when they were alone—and the conclusion to which they came was, that their affairs could not go on in this way much longer, and that a change for better or worse was sure to come before many days more had passed away.

"I suppose our situation might be worse, but I can't see how," said Marcy, rising from his seat on the sofa and looking out at one of the streaming windows.

"Would it not be worse if we had no roof to shelter us in weather like this?" inquired Mrs. Gray.

"It would be bad for us if our house was burned, of course," answered Marcy. "But as for a roof, we shall always have that. If they turn us out of here we'll go to the quarters; and if they burn us out of there, we'll go into the woods and throw up a shanty. As long as they leave me or a single darky on the place the weather will never trouble you, mother."

"But I am afraid they will not leave you with me," replied Mrs. Gray. "You know that General Wise has asked the Richmond authorities to re-enforce him at Roanoke Island, and they have told him to re-enforce himself. You know what that means?"

"Yes; it means a general drumming up of recruits among the lukewarm rebels hereabouts. But it doesn't scare me. When I see such fellows as Allison, Goodwin, Shelby, and Dillon, and a dozen others I could mention, shoulder a musket and go to the defence of the Island, then I shall begin to worry about myself, and not before. Mother, Captain Beardsley and his friends will not permit me to be forced into the army, and neither will they let harm come to you, if they have influence enough to prevent it."

"Marcy, I am afraid you are placing too much reliance upon Aleck Webster and his friends," said his mother. "They have not brought Beardsley home yet. Suppose he has the courage to defy them?"

"But he hasn't," said the boy earnestly. "He hasn't had time to answer that letter yet, but he will do it, and he will answer it in person. I know he would have the courage to brave an open enemy, especially if he was driven into a corner and couldn't run, but it worries him, as it does everyone else, to have people work against him in secret. He will come home before he will allow his property to be destroyed, and Aleck assured me that if anything happens to us, Beardsley will have to stand punishment for it. But I do wish he had not caught Jack and me at Crooked Inlet. He will tell all about it the minute he gets home—he would die if he had to keep it to himself—and I am afraid the folks about here will do something to us in spite of all Beardsley and his friends can do to prevent it. I wonder where those two horsemen are going in such haste. Why, mother, they are rebel officers, and they are turning toward the gate. Yes, sir; they are coming in. Now what do you suppose they want here?"

This was a startling piece of news, and a question that Mrs. Gray could not answer. Although there were two garrisons within a few miles of the plantation, one being located at Plymouth and the other at Roanoke Island, Marcy and his mother seldom saw any soldiers, unless they happened to be neighbors who had enlisted, and come home on a few days' furlough. These furloughed men never came near the house, but rode by without looking at it; while the two men who were now approaching were headed straight for it, and their actions seemed to indicate that they had business with some member of the family. Marcy glanced at his mother's pale but resolute face, and then he looked up at the Confederate banner—the one Captain Semmes hoisted at the *Sabine's* peak when he put his prize crew aboard of her, and which Sailor Jack had captured and brought home with him. That flag had twice taken the little *Fairy Belle* in safety past the rebel fortifications down the river, and Marcy had great hopes of it now.

"It may not serve you this time as well as it did before," said his mother, who seemed to read the thoughts that were passing in his mind. "I was afraid you would miss it by passing those batteries in broad daylight, but I do not understand these things, and did not think it best to raise any objections to Jack's plans."

"Why, mother, we never could have run those works in the dark without being seen and fired at and perhaps sunk," replied Marcy.

"The very impudence of the thing was what disarmed suspicion and saved us from being searched. We'll soon know the worst now, for here they are at the bottom of the steps. I shall ask them right in here."

So saying Marcy opened the door that gave entrance into the hall, and called for Julius to run around to the front door and take charge of a couple of horses he would find there, after which he stepped out upon the gallery just as the Confederates were getting ready to hail the house.

"Good-morning, gentlemen," said he. "Alight, and give your nags over to this boy."

The officers replied in courteous tones, and when they had ascended the steps to the gallery and turned down the wide collars of their gray overcoats, Marcy was somewhat relieved to find that they were both strangers, and that they did not look at him as though they had anything unpleasant to say to him.

"I am Captain Porter, at your service, and my friend here is Lieutenant Anderson; no relation, however, to the Yankee hero of Fort Sumter, who, so I am told, is about to be canonized by the Northern people," said the elder of the two; and then he waited a moment for his subordinate to laugh at his wit. "If you are Marcy Gray and the head man of the plantation, you are the man we are looking for. Who wouldn't be a soldier this fine weather? How is your arm coming on by this time?"

Marcy was beginning to feel a little at his ease in the presence of his unwelcome visitors, but this abrupt question aroused his fears on the instant. Did the captain know what was the matter with his arm? and if he did, which one of their gossiping neighbors told him about it? He was anxious to know, but afraid to ask.

"It is getting better every day, thank you," was his reply. "Will you not come and speak to my mother? Julius will put your horses under shelter."

"We are 'most too muddy to go into the presence of a lady," said the captain, looking down at his boots, "but as I don't want to blot my notebook by taking it out in the rain, I think we'll have to go in. We had a short but interesting chat with your captain a while ago."

"Beardsley?" Marcy almost gasped. "Has he got home?"

"Of course he has. You didn't think the Yankees had captured him, I hope. He gave us a good account of you, and since you can't run the blockade any more, I wish you would hurry up and get well so that you can join——"

Right here the captain stopped long enough to permit Marcy to introduce him and his lieutenant to Mrs. Gray. They sat down in the easy-chairs that were brought for them, made a few remarks about the weather, and then the captain resumed.

"Yes; we saw Beardsley this morning, and would have been glad to spend a longer time with him, but business prevented. He says you are a brave and skilful pilot, and I happen to know that they are the sort of men who are needed on our gunboats; but, of course, you can't go just now. Hallo!" exclaimed the captain, whose gaze had wandered to the rebel flag that hung upon the wall. "Where did you get that, if it is a fair question?"

"It is one my brother brought home with him," answered Marcy, speaking with a calmness that surprised himself. "He was second mate and pilot of the blockade runner *West Wind* that was fitted out and loaded in the port of Boston."

"Oh, yes; we heard all about him too," said the captain, and Marcy afterward confessed that the words frightened him out of a year's growth. "He went down to Newbern to ship on an ironclad he didn't find; so I suppose he went into the army, did he not?"

"Not that I know of," answered Marcy, looking first one officer and then the other squarely in the eye. "Almost the last thing I heard him say was, that he was going to ship on a war vessel."

"Then he will have to come back here to do it, for there is no ironclad building at Newbern, and I don't see why he did not ship with Commodore Lynch in the first place," said Captain Porter. "But doubtless he wanted to serve on deep water. Now to business. We want negroes to work on the fortifications on and about the Island, and Captain Beardsley sent us here to get some. He said he thought you might spare, say fifty or more."

Marcy was suspicious of everything Beardsley said and did, and wondered if this was a new move on the man's part to bring him and his mother into trouble with the Confederate authorities. If it was a trap Marcy did not fall into it.

"You can call on my mother for double that number," said he without an instant's hesitation. "We can't spare them, of course, for there's work enough to be done on the place; but all the same you will have to get them."

"All right," answered the captain, pulling out his notebook. "Send them down to Plymouth as soon as you can and in any way you please, and we will furnish them with transportation and take care of them after that. By the way, it's rather queer about that overseer of yours. Where do you imagine he is now?"

If Marcy had not been fully on the alert this question would have struck him dumb; but the captain, whose suspicions had not been in the least aroused, and who believed Marcy and his mother to be as good Confederates as he was himself, had unwittingly paved the way for it by talking so freely about Captain Beardsley.

"It was a very strange as well as a most alarming proceeding," admitted Mrs. Gray, who thought it time for her to take part in the conversation. "I have not yet fully recovered from the fright it gave me," she added, with a smile, "and we have not the faintest idea where Hanson is now."

"What was Hanson anyhow? Which side was he on?"

"I don't know," replied Marcy. "Sometimes he claimed to be one thing, and then he claimed to be another."

"Captain Beardsley thinks he was in favor of the South."

"That proves my words, for he assured me that he was a Union man, and wanted to know if I was going to discharge him on account of his principles. I told him I was not, and added that if Shelby and Dillon and their friends wanted him driven from the place they could come up and do the work themselves, for I would have no hand in it. I desire to live in peace with all my neighbors."

"Oh, you can't do that, and it's no use to try," exclaimed the captain, getting upon his feet and buttoning his heavy coat. "Beyond a doubt your overseer was a Confederate in principle; and if that is so, his abductors must have been Union men. If Confederates had carried him away they would not hesitate to say so. Those Unionists must be your near neighbors, and if I were in your place, I should not show my colors quite so plainly," added the captain, pointing to the banner on the wall. "I am surprised to learn that there are so many traitors in my State, and we shall turn our attention to them as soon as we have beaten back the Yankee invaders of our soil."

"Do you think there will be any more fighting, captain?" asked Mrs. Gray anxiously.

"Yes, madam, I do. I am not one of those who believe that the North is going to be easily whipped. They do not belong to our race, I am glad to say, but they are a hardy, enduring people, and although they don't know how to fight they think they do, and they are going to give us a struggle. We must hold fast to Roanoke Island, for the possession of that important point would give the enemy a chance to operate in the rear of Norfolk. We expect to have a brush with them soon, and when it comes, we intend to make another Bull Run affair of it. I wish we could remain longer, but our duties call us away. I trust you will have those negroes down to us to-morrow."

Mrs. Gray replied that they should be sent without loss of time, and Marcy went out to tell Julius to bring up the horses. When he came back and followed the officers to the front door, he inquired if they had heard what Beardsley's reason was for quitting a profitable business and coming home so unexpectedly.

"Oh, yes; Beardsley told us all about it. He said he was afraid of the Yankees, and he didn't act as though he was ashamed to confess it. Their cruisers are getting so thick along the coast that a sailing vessel stands no chance. I asked him if he was going to enlist and he thought not. He wants to do his fighting on the water."

"He wants to do his fighting with his mouth," was what Marcy said to himself. "He will neither enlist nor ship; but he will stay at home and try by all the mean arts that he is master of to keep mother and me in trouble." Then aloud he said: "I am glad he came home, for it lets me out of the service. I have no desire to face any more steam launches that carry howitzers."

"I suppose not," said the captain, giving Marcy's hand a hearty farewell shake. "The more I see of those people the less I like to face them in battle. I hope you will soon have the use of your arm again, and that I shall see you by my side fighting for the glorious cause of Southern independence. Good-by."

The two officers mounted and rode away, Marcy remained upon the gallery long enough to wave his hand to them as they passed through the gate, and then he went into the house and to the room in which he had left his mother.

"What did I tell you?" were the first words he uttered. "Didn't I say that Beardsley would not let harm come to us if he could help it? I tell you, mother, he is afraid of the men who carried Hanson away and ordered him to come home."

"Well, then, is he not aware that we are looking to those same men for protection?" inquired Mrs. Gray.

"If he doesn't know it he suspects it pretty strongly. Aleck Webster told me that Beardsley had been warned to cease persecuting Union people in this settlement. That includes you and me, for the minute Beardsley saw and recognized my schooner in Crooked Inlet, that very minute he knew where to place us. He knows where Jack is now as well as we know it ourselves."

"And will he not tell of it?"

"Of course, for it is to his interest to do so. If he has been home long enough to ride into Nashville, he has told Shelby and Dillon of it before this time. I wish I could see a copy of the letter that was sent to him by Aleck and his friends. I am sorry to lose all our best hands at the very time we need them most, but all the same I am glad those officers came here. They didn't say *money* once, and that proves that Beardsley could not have spoken of it in their hearing."

"O Marcy," exclaimed Mrs. Gray, rising from her chair and nervously pacing the room. "I little dreamed that that money would be the occasion of so much anxiety to all of us. I almost wish I had never seen it. I can't sleep of nights for thinking of it, and sometimes I imagine I hear someone moving about the cellar."

"I don't wish you had never heard of it," replied Marcy. "We can't tell how long it will be before a dollar or two of it may come handy to us. Say, mother," he added, stepping to her side and placing his arm about her waist, "do you think you would be any easier in your mind if you did not know just where that money was, so long as you knew it was safe?"

"I know I should," was the reply, given in cautious tones. "But, my son, you must not attempt to remove it to another hiding-place.

There seem to be so many who are on the watch, that I am sure you would be detected at it. That would mean ruin for you and arrest and imprisonment for me."

Marcy Gray was surprised, frightened, and angered by the words—surprised to learn that his mother was tormented by the very fear that had been uppermost in the mind of the absent Jack; frightened when he reflected how very easy it would be for some of their secret enemies to bring evidence to prove that every dollar of the money that was concealed in the cellar-wall rightfully belonged to Northern men, and that Mrs. Gray was hoarding it for her own use in violation of the law in such cases made and provided; and angered when he thought of the many indignities that would be put upon his mother by the Confederate authorities, who had showed themselves to be brutally vindictive and merciless in dealing with those whose opinions differed from their own. He drew a long breath which was very like a sob, and led his mother back to her seat on the sofa.

"All right," said he, with an appearance of cheerfulness that he was far from feeling. "I thought it would be a load off your mind if you could say that there is no money about the house except the little you carry in your pocket."

Mrs. Gray noticed that the boy did not promise to let the money alone, but before she could call his attention to the fact Marcy faced about and went into the hall after his coat and cap.

"It is almost time for the hands to have their dinner," said he, "and when I get them together I will tell them the news. Of course they will be delighted with it."

"I am afraid they will put them under some old overseer who will abuse and drive them beyond their strength," observed Mrs. Gray.

"I think it likely that they will see the difference between working for you and working for somebody else," admitted Marcy. "But these are war times, and when we can't help ourselves we must do as we are told. Our darkies ought to be glad of an opportunity to labor for the government that is fighting to keep them slaves. I wonder how many Captain Beardsley will send!"

"You said a while ago that it would be to the captain's interest to tell of his meeting with you and Jack at Crooked Inlet," observed Mrs. Gray. "I didn't quite understand that."

"Well, you see Beardsley needs help to carry out his plans, and his game now is to do nothing that will cause Hanson's abductors to turn their attention to him and his buildings. He believes, and he has good reason to believe, that certain men around here have it in their power to damage him greatly; and if he can bring Shelby and Dillon and the rest of the gang to his way of thinking, they will be apt to let us alone. Now I will go out and make a detail of the men we need about the place, and tell the others that they must be ready to march at daylight in the morning. I am not going to send them off in this rain."

"The captain said nothing about picks and shovels," suggested Mrs. Gray. "Perhaps it would be well——"

"Picks and shovels cost money," interrupted Marcy, "and we are not going to send any down there to be stolen. Let the Confederate government furnish its own tools. Now I am beaten again! Here are two more visitors, and this time they are Captain Beardsley and Colonel Shelby."

This very unwelcome announcement brought Mrs. Gray to her feet in a twinkling. "What do you think they can want here?" she almost gasped, with a good deal of emphasis on the pronoun.

"They are coming to make friends with you, so that you will not tell the Union men to destroy their property," replied Marcy.

"But, my son, I never would do anything of the kind. And besides, I do not know the Union men, or where to find them."

"No difference so long as they think you do. Now sit down and be as independent as you please, and I will let them in. Julius, stand by the front door to take those horses."

These men were admitted as the others were, but with very different feelings on the part of those they came to visit. Captain Porter and his lieutenant had donned uniforms and were ready to risk their lives for the cause in which they honestly believed, but these two lacked the courage to do that. Beardsley was ready to do anything that would bring him a dollar, provided there was no danger in it, while Shelby would not have enlisted if he knew that he could thereby earn a right to the title that was now given him out of respect to his wealth. They were ready to urge or drive others into the army, but it hurt them to be obliged to send their negroes to work on the fortifications. Colonel Shelby entered the room and seated himself with an air of a gentleman, while Beardsley acted the boor, as he always did. He gave Marcy's well hand a tremendous grip and shake, and said, in the same voice he would have used if he had been hailing the masthead:

"Well, how do you find yourself by this time? Ain't you sorry now that you didn't take out a venture when I wanted you to, so that you might be shaking thousands in your pocket at this minute, when you've only got hunderds? My respects to you, Mrs. Gray; but when me and this boy of yourn get to talking we don't know when to stop. Hope you have been well since I saw you last, and that the carrying away of your overseer didn't scare you none."

Marcy was well enough acquainted with Captain Beardsley to know that he did not rattle on in this style for nothing. The man was excited and nervous, and tried to conceal his feelings under a cloak of hearty good nature and jollity that ill became him. Marcy sat down and looked at him in a way that made Captain Beardsley mutter to himself:

"I'd like the best in the world to wring that there brat's neck. He's got the upper hand of me and Shelby and all of us, and dog-gone the luck, he knows it. I'd give a dollar to know what he's got on his mind this very minute."

After a little talk on various subjects that were of no particular interest to anybody, Captain Beardsley introduced the subject of blockade running, and gave a glowing description of the manner in which he had hoodwinked the Yankee cruisers by dodging out of Ocracoke Inlet while they were busy fighting the forts at Hatteras. He seemed to look upon it as a very daring and skillful exploit, and yet it was nothing more than any alert shipmaster would have done under the same circumstances.

"After that we had fun alive," added the captain; and Marcy was surprised to see him put his hand into the pocket of his overcoat and bring out a good-sized canvas bag which was filled so full of something heavy that it would not hold any more. "All we had to do was to run down to Nassau, discharge our cargo, and load up and come back again; and all the while we was making money till I couldn't eat *nor* sleep on account of it, and the Yankees never showed up to bother us."

"You were fortunate," said Marcy, when Beardsley stopped and looked at him.

"That ain't no name for it. We had the best kind of luck. I kept a bright watch for that steam launch when we passed through Crooked Inlet, but she had got tired of waiting and went off somewheres. We seen one or two little blockade runners like ourselves, but no Yankees. Now there's your share of the profits, Marcy," said the captain, and he got up and placed the canvas bag upon the table. "We made two runs, and I promised you I would give you five hunderd dollars——"

"But, Captain," exclaimed Marcy, while Mrs. Gray looked troubled, "I have no right to take that money. I wasn't aboard the *Hattie* when she made those two runs."

"That's the gospel truth; but didn't I say I would keep your place open for you while you was laid up in ordinary with your broken arm? I did for a fact, and I always stand to what I say."

"But I haven't done the first thing to earn that thousand dollars, and I hope you will believe that I am in dead earnest when I assure you that I'll not touch it," replied Marcy.

There was no doubt about his earnestness, and the captain looked disappointed. He settled back in his chair and nodded at Shelby, and that was a bad thing for him to do. It told Marcy as plainly as words what their object was in coming there to call upon him and his mother.

"Even if you were not on board the *Hattie* when she made those successful trips, you belonged to her, and have a right to demand pay according to contract," said the colonel.

"And while I belonged to her I took pay according to contract," said Marcy quickly. "I was paid by the run and not by the month."

"I have never heard that the pay of an enlisted man ceases the moment he is injured," added the colonel.

"Nor I either; but I am not an enlisted man, and what's more, I do not intend to be."

"Well, if you won't take the money, you will acknowledge that I tried to do the fair thing by you?" said Beardsley.

"I am willing to say that you offered me some money and that I declined to take it," answered the boy, who knew very well that Beardsley was not trying to do the fair thing by him. "As it is nobody's business, I never expect to be questioned about it."

The captain took little share in the conversation that followed. He put the canvas bag into his pocket, folded his arms and went into the dumps, where he remained until the name of the missing overseer was mentioned, and then he brightened up to say:

"That there was a little the strangest thing I ever heard tell of. What's went with Hanson, do you reckon?"

"I haven't the least idea where he is," was Marcy's answer.

"I know you wasn't to home when he was took off—leastwise I have been told so," said Beardsley, "but I didn't know but mebbe you and your maw might suspicion somebody. Now what you going to do for an overseer? There's that renter of mine, Kelsey his name is. I know you don't collogue with no such, but mebbe you know who he is."

Marcy started, and looked first at his mother and then at Captain Beardsley. The latter sat with his bearded chin on his breast, regarding Marcy through his half-closed eyelids, and there was an expression on his face that had a volume of meaning in it. Taken by surprise at last, the usually sharp-witted boy had betrayed the secret he was most anxious to keep from the knowledge of everybody.

CHAPTER V.

MARCY'S RASH WISH.

"I KNOW mighty well that Kelsey is trifling and lazy when he ain't got nothing much to occupy his mind," said Beardsley, who was not slow to catch the meaning of the frightened glances which mother and son so quickly exchanged, "but when he was working on my place and bossing my hands, I found him——"

"Are you in earnest in proposing him for my mother's overseer?" cried Marcy, as soon as he could speak. "Our fields can grow up to briars first."

"But really, he wants work," began the colonel.

"Then let him go down to the Island and work in the trenches," replied Marcy. "He can't come here."

"But Kelsey is the only support of his family," the colonel remarked. "He is loyal to our cause, and would enlist in a minute if he had enough ahead to support his wife and children during his absence; but he hasn't got it."

"They will fare just as well without him as they do with him. If they get hungry, my mother will no doubt feed them as she has done a hundred times before; but Kelsey can't come on this place to work. There isn't money enough in the State to induce us to agree to that."

"But what you uns going to do for an overseer?" said Beardsley again. "You'll need one if you intend to run the place."

"Not until the hands return from the Island," replied Marcy, "and then I shall take hold myself."

Having done all they intended to do when they came there the visitors were ready to leave, and Colonel Shelby gave the signal by arising from his chair and pulling his collar up about his ears.

"I still think, Mrs. Gray, that Marcy ought to take this money," said he. "The captain does not offer it to him as a gift but as his due."

"We perfectly understand the object he had in mind," answered the lady; whereupon the colonel opened his eyes and looked at her very hard. "But if Marcy thinks he ought not to receive it I have nothing to say."

"I hope you will not regret it," said the colonel. "Some people seem to think that we are about entering upon a long conflict, and that money will be a necessary thing to have after a while."

"But if you get hard up, which I hope you won't, don't forget that this thousand dollars is all yourn, Marcy," exclaimed the captain.

Marcy assured him that he would bear it in mind. If Beardsley hoped to hear him declare that his mother had more money in the house than she was likely to need, he was disappointed.

"And don't forget either, that if at any time you stand in need of such assistance as the captain and I can give, you must not hesitate to say so," continued the colonel, as he bowed to Mrs. Gray and followed Marcy to the door. "Our little settlement, I am sorry to say, is full of the meanest of traitors, and it may comfort you to know that there are a few persons in it to whom you can speak freely."

"We know that, and it certainly is a very great comfort to us," replied Marcy, thinking of Aleck Webster. "It will take more than a thousand dollars to keep roofs over your heads if anything comes of this day's work," was what he added to himself when he had seen the men ride out of the yard. "I saw through your little game from the first, and yet I went and gave myself away. That was about the biggest piece of foolishness I was ever guilty of; but I suppose it was to be so. I was all in the dark before, but I know what I am going to do now."

In order that we may know whether or not Marcy's fears were well founded, let us ride with Beardsley and his companion long enough to overhear a few words of their conversation. The moment they rode out of the gate, and were concealed from the house by the thick shrubbery and trees that surrounded it, Beardsley threw back the collar of his coat, giving the cold rain and sleet a fair chance at him, and almost reeled in his saddle, so convulsed was he with the merriment that could no longer be restrained.

"I done it, by gum!" he exclaimed, shaking his head and flourishing his riding-whip in the air. "I done it, didn't I?"

"You did not purchase his good-will, if that is what you mean," answered his companion. "He wouldn't touch your gold. He knew why you offered it as well as I did, and I was satisfied from the start that you would not catch him that way. He will put those Union men on you if you so much as crook your finger."

"But I aint a-going to crook no fingers," said Beardsley, with a hoarse laugh. "Let him sick 'em on if he wants to, but he'd best watch out that I don't get there first. Say, colonel, that there money is in the house all right, just as we uns thought it was."

"How do you know?" exclaimed his companion. The colonel had not noticed the frightened glances that Marcy and his mother exchanged when Kelsey's name was mentioned, and he was surprised to hear Beardsley speak so positively.

"Say!" answered the captain. "You aint forgot how you sent Kelsey up to Mrs. Gray's, while I was at sea, to make some inquiries about the money she was thought to have stowed away, have you? Well, Marcy and his mother aint forgot it nuther; and when I spoke Kelsey's name, and said mebbe he would be a good one to take Hanson's place, Marcy jumped like I had stuck a pin in him."

"Well, what of it?"

"What of it? Marcy knowed in a minute that I wanted to have that man took on the plantation for to snoop around of nights and find out all about that money. But I aint a-caring. I know the money is there, and that's all I wanted to find out. The ways I have talked and schemed and planned to make that there boy say that him and his maw had as much as they wanted to tide them through the war that's coming, is just amazing, now that I think of it; but not a word could I get out of him. He was too smart to be ketched; but all on a sudden he gives out the secret as easy as falling off a log. The money is there, I tell you."

"And you intend to get it, I suppose?" added the colonel. "Well, now, look here, Beardsley; don't say a word to me about it."

"All right, Colonel," said Beardsley, who could scarcely have been happier if he had had the whole of Mrs. Gray's thirty thousand dollars where he could put his hand upon it at any time he pleased. "I know what you mean by them words. Of course you are too big a man and too rich to go into business with me, but I know some who aint. I'll show them Grays that they aint so great as they think for."

"Have you so soon forgotten what that letter said?" inquired the colonel. "If anything happens to Marcy's mother or her property some of us will be sure to suffer for it, unless you are sharp enough to lay the blame upon some one else."

"Say!" replied Beardsley, in a whisper. "That's what I'm thinking of doing. Your time's your own, I reckon, aint it? and you don't mind a little mite of rain, do you? Then come with me and see how I am going to work it."

So saying the captain urged his horse into a lope, and Colonel Shelby followed his example. After a while they turned into one of the narrow lanes that ran through Beardsley's cultivated fields to the woods that lay behind them, galloped past Mrs. Brown's cheerless cabin, and at last drew rein before the door of one that was still more cheerless and dilapidated. It stood in one corner of a little patch of ground that had been planted to corn and potatoes, and which had received such slight care and attention of late years that the blackberry briars were beginning to take possession of it. A small pack of lean and hungry coon dogs greeted the visitors as they stopped in front of the cabin, and their yelping soon brought their master to the door. He was the same lazy Kelsey we once saw sitting on the front porch of Mrs. Gray's house, only his hair was longer, his whiskers more tangled and matted, and his clothes worse for wear.

"Alight and hitch," was the way in which he welcomed Captain Beardsley and his companion. "Git out, ye whelps!"

"Can't stop so long," replied the captain.

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"Been over to Mrs. Gray's to see how my pilot was getting on, and tried to scare up a job for you at overseering, in the place of that chap who was took off in the night time."

"I dunno's I am a-caring for a job of that sort," answered Kelsey. "I've got a sight of work of my own that had oughter be did."

"That's so," said Beardsley, glancing at the broken fences, the bare wood-yard and the briars that were encroaching upon the borders of the little field. "But there's no ready money in your work, while there is a sight of it up to the Grays."

"I won't work for no sich," declared Kelsey. "They think too much of their niggers."

"They set a heap more store by them nor they do by such poor folks as you be. But you needn't bother. They won't take you and give you a chance to keep your head above water, and put a bite of grub into the mouths of your family and a few duds on their backs. They allowed that they wouldn't have no such trifling hound as you on their place."

"Did Mrs. Gray use them words about me?" exclaimed Kelsey, growing excited on the instant.

"I heard somebody say them very words, but I aint naming no names; nor I aint been nowheres except up to Mrs. Gray's to-day. One of 'em allowed that if you wasn't too dog-gone useless to live, you'd go and 'list on the Island."

"I'm jest as good as they be," said the man, who by this time was looking as though he felt very ugly.

"That's so. And some of 'em likewise said that a man who was too lazy to keep a tight roof over his own head, when he could have nails and boards by asking for 'em, wouldn't do no good as an overseer," added Beardsley, counting the holes in the top of the cabin through which the rafters could be seen, and glancing at the stick chimney, which leaned away from the wall as if it were about to topple over. "But that aint what I come here for, to carry tales about my neighbors. I want to say I'm glad to see you doing so well, and that if you are needing a small side of meat and a little meal, you know where to get 'em."

"Sarvant, sah," replied Kelsey. "That there is more neighbor-like than demeaning a man for a trifling hound because he is pore, and I'll bear it in mind, I bet you. As for my roof, it's a heap better'n the one them Grays will have to cover them in a week from now; you hear me? That big house of theirn will burn like a bresh-heap."

"Well, take care of yourself," answered the captain. "But if I'd suspicioned you was going to fly mad about it, I wouldn't 'a' spoke a word to you."

"Kelsey will never carry out his threat," said Colonel Shelby, as the two rode away from the cabin. "He is too big a coward."

"I know that mighty well, but you can say that you heard him speak them very words, can't you?"

Captain Beardsley was very lively and talkative after that, and plumed himself on having done a neat stroke of work that would turn suspicion from himself, when the results of a certain other plan he had in his head should become known in the settlement. But perhaps we shall see that he forgot one very important thing. As to the colonel, although he approved the work that was to be done, he had the profoundest contempt for the man who could deliberately plan and carry it out. He had little to say, and was glad when his horse brought him to a bridle-path that would take him away from Beardsley and toward his own home.

Meanwhile Marcy Gray was in a most uncomfortable frame of mind. When he saw the visitors ride out of the gate, he closed the door and went back to his mother. "The captain never spoke of meeting you and Jack at Crooked Inlet," were the first words she uttered.

"Of course not," replied Marcy. "You did not expect him to, did you? But I rather looked for him to give some reason for coming home, and to hear him say that he would have no further occasion for my services; but he was so disappointed because I would not take that hush-money——"

"O Marcy!" exclaimed his mother. "I

was afraid that that was what the money was intended for."

"That was just it, and how the colonel stared when you said you understood the object Beardsley had in view in offering it. Those men think we can destroy their buildings or protect them, just as we please."

"But, Marcy, we cannot do it."

"Let them keep on thinking so if they want to. And another reason Beardsley didn't say all he meant to was because I was foolish enough to give him something else to think about. I was frightened when he mentioned Kelsey's name, for I knew in an instant what he wanted the man on the place for, and I showed that I was frightened."

"So did I, Marcy," groaned Mrs. Gray. "So did I."

"Well, it can't be expected that a woman will be on the watch all the time, but I ought to have had better sense. I gave Beardsley good reason for thinking that there is something on or about the place that we don't want a stranger to know anything about, and of course he believes it is money. But don't you worry. We'll come out all right in the end."

So saying Marcy put on his coat and cap, kissed his mother, and left the house to tell one of the hands to put the saddle on his horse. At the door he met old Morris, who was just coming in with the mail. He saw at a glance that the darky was frightened.

"Marse Marcy, dere's going be great doings 'bout dis place," he began.

"Never mind. I can't stop to hear about it now, for I am in a hurry. Give those papers and letters to one of the girls, and let her carry them in. I wouldn't have you go into my mother's presence with that face of yours for anything. Say nothing to nobody, and I will see you again as I can go to the quarter and back."

From his earliest boyhood Marcy had always been glad to go among the field hands when he was troubled, for they were so full of fun, and had so many quaint and amusing things to say to him that gloomy thoughts could not long keep his company in their presence; but it was not so this time. He silenced all their laughter by the very first words he spoke to them. All the able-bodied men among them (and Marcy designated them by name) were to start for Plymouth before daylight the next morning, to work on the Confederate fortifications. Some of them rebelled at once, and declared that they wouldn't stir a step, but thought better of it when Marcy told them that, if they did not go willingly, they would be marched down by a squad of soldiers, who would not hesitate to help them along by a prod from a bayonet if they showed the least disposition to lag behind. It took him longer to get through with this disagreeable duty than he thought it would, for the blacks hung around him, and clung to his hands as though they never expected to see him again ; but it was accomplished at last, and then Marcy turned about, and rode back to the house to interview the coachman. He found him wandering disconsolately about among the horses, too dispirited to work. The two went out in the rain together, taking care to keep out of sight of the sitting-room windows, and the faithful old darky astonished the white boy by describing, almost word for word, as we have told it, what had been said and done in Mrs. Brown's cabin that morning while Tom Allison and Mark Goodwin were there. He said not a word until Morris finished his story, and then he inquired :

"Where did you hear all this?"

"Marse Beardsley's niggah gal, Nancy, was dar, and heared and seen it all wid her own eyes and ears," replied Morris. "She met me on de road when I was coming home wid de mule and de mail, and done told me. Is dat a fac' 'bout de money, Marse Marcy?"

The boy did not in the least doubt the truthfulness of the story. He knew that the girl Nancy looked out for Mrs. Brown's comfort in a shiftless sort of way; that long association with the old gossip had made her a tolerable gossip herself ; and that, although she was often sent to the overseer on account of it, she kept on talking just the same. Besides, Nancy could not have known about the money unless she had heard somebody speak of it. And Mark Goodwin was sure it was concealed in the cellar wall! That was the worst piece of news Marcy Gray had ever listened to. He stood for some minutes looking down at the ground in deep study, and then he seized the black man's arm and drew him closer to him. He gave him some rapid whispered instructions, old Morris now and then nodding, as if to show that he understood them perfectly, and then they shook hands, as two brothers might have done, and separated.

At daylight the next morning there was not a single able-bodied black man to be seen on Mrs. Gray's plantation, if we except the few who found employment about the house, the working party having left hours before. Marcy saw them from his window as they marched out of the gate with their bundles on their backs, but he did not go down to speak to them. He had taken leave of them once, and had no desire to go through the same ordeal again. He rode into Nashville that morning, as he did every other morning for the next two weeks, but the only news he heard related to the fortifications at Roanoke Island, which grew in size and strength every day, and were to be held at all hazards. He thought it strange that he did not see Aleck Webster, but, of course, he dared not ask after him. He saw Allison, and Goodwin, and others of that stamp, who went out of their way to profess friendship for him; but Marcy never lingered long in their company until one day when they followed him to the hitching-rack, after he had secured his mail, to warn him that he had better have an eye on that man Kelsey, who meant harm to him.

"What does he think he has against me?" was the first question Marcy asked. "Doesn't he want me to feed him any more?"

"He doesn't want grub so much as he wants work," replied Goodwin. "And you wouldn't hire him to take Hanson's place."

"Hadn't we a right to say who shall work for us and who shall not?" demanded Marcy. "But we don't need anybody. I am going to act as my mother's overseer; that is, if I ever have any hands to oversee."

"But Kelsey doesn't like to be called a lazy, trifling hound; and you wouldn't like it either," said Allison.

"I never called him that. I simply said

that I would let the fields grow up to briars before I would have him on the place, and I say so yet. Let him enlist, if he wants something to do."

"But he can't enlist. The doctors wouldn't pass him."

"Has he tried them?"

"What would be the use? Can't you see for yourself how he is bent almost double with rheumatism?"

"I can see how he bends over because he is too lazy to straighten up, but I never heard that he had rheumatism. What is he going to do to me?"

"He has threatened to burn you out."

"I expect to be burned out, but not by that man Kelsey. Now mind what I say, you two. When that thing happens you will see some disappointed men and boys right here in this settlement, and our house will be in good company when it burns. Good-morning."

"Hold on!" exclaimed Mark. "Don't go off mad. What do you mean?"

"I mean what I say," answered Marcy, who wanted to say more, but thought it would not be prudent. "And there is no need that I should enter into explanations with you and Tom Allison."

Marcy rode away, wondering if he had done wrong in letting those young rebels see that he was so well posted. If he had made a mistake in speaking so plainly it was too late to mourn over it now. He wished he might have opportunity to exchange a few words with Aleck Webster, and sometimes, during the week that followed, he was strongly tempted to ride by his house in the hope of seeing him there; but prudence always interposed in time to keep him from doing anything so rash. Then he waited and hoped for a sign from some of the other members of the band; but, although he was sure that he met and spoke to them every day in the post-office, they said no word to him that could not have been uttered in the presence of a third party, nor did they give him a chance to speak to them in private. Marcy told himself that it was little short of maddening to live in this way—to know that there were enemies all about him and not a single old-time friend of his family to whom he could go for advice or comfort. The state of suspense he was in day and night was hard to bear, and Marcy was almost ready to do some desperate deed to bring it to an end.

A few days more passed and once more Colonel Shelby and Captain Beardsley came to visit the family. This was nothing unusual, for they and others often came now to keep up an appearance of friendship, and to inquire if there was any way in which they could be of assistance to Mrs. Gray. They stayed an hour, and when they went away, and Marcy and his mother reviewed the conversation that had taken place during the visit, to see if they had been entrapped into saying anything they ought not to have said, the only news they remembered to have heard was that Shelby and Beardsley, and some others whose names they mentioned, were going down to the Island to inspect the works, and see how their hands were getting along under their military overseers. They would probably be gone three or four days, and if Marcy or his mother desired to send a word of remembrance to any faithful old servant, they should be pleased to take it.

"I am getting heartily tired of visits of this sort," said Marcy. "I wish they would keep away, and let us alone, for I don't care to talk to men I have to watch all the time. I am afraid there is something back of these friendly calls."

There was something back of this one at any rate—something that was very like a tragedy; and the first act was performed that night a little after dark. Marcy was just rising from a late supper, when the sound of hoofs was heard on the carriage-way, and Bose challenged with all his might. When Marcy opened the door he saw the horseman bending down from his saddle, and waving his hand at the dog as if he were trying to quiet him. He was so far away that Marcy could not see who he was, although the light from the hall lamp streamed brightly out into the darkness. When he heard the boy's step upon the porch the man straightened up, but did not offer to come any nearer.

"What is wanted?" demanded Marcy.

"Does this yere road lead to Nashville?" asked a hoarse, gruff voice that Marcy had never heard before.

"The one outside the gate leads to Nashville, but the one you are on leads up to this door," answered the boy, who, for some reason or other, began to feel uneasy.

"You aint overly civil to strangers in these parts, seems like," said the man. "I've been out lookin' for niggers to work on the forts, an' got lost, if it will do you any good to know it." And, with the words, he turned his horse about, and galloped out of the yard.

It was a very simple incident—one that was likely to happen at any time—but all that evening Marcy could not get it out of his mind. He could not read, either, and did not want to talk, so he went to bed at an early hour; but before he did so, he made the rounds of the house with a lighted lantern in his hand. Bose was in his usual place on the rug in front of the door, and so fast asleep that he did not move when his master stepped over him, and the doors and windows in the lower part of the house, as well as those in the cellar, were closed and fastened, and, having satisfied himself on these points, Marcy bade his mother good-night, and went to his room. But he did not close his door. He took pains to leave it wide open, and called himself foolish for doing it.

"I am getting to be afraid of the dark," was what he thought, as he turned down his lamp and tumbled into bed. "There isn't a darky on the plantation who hates to have night come as bad as I do, and I don't know that there is anything surprising in it. If there is danger hanging over this house, I wish it would drop, and have done with it."

Marcy went to sleep with this rash wish half formed in his mind.

CHAPTER VI.

THE WISH GRATIFIED.

MARCY GRAY slept like a boy who had eaten heartily of mince pie for supper, that is, uneasily. But still he must have slumbered soundly or he would have heard the faint scream and the hoarse, muffled voice that came up from his mother's room shortly after midnight, or been awakened by the swift rush of the two figures who hastened up the stairs and through the wide-open door into his room. The figures were there, but the first Marcy knew of it was when one turned up the lamp and the other laid a heavy hand upon his shoulder. Then he opened his eyes and tried to sit up, but was pressed back upon his pillow at the same instant that the cold, sharp muzzle of a revolver was put against his head.

"Keep still now, you pore white trash, and

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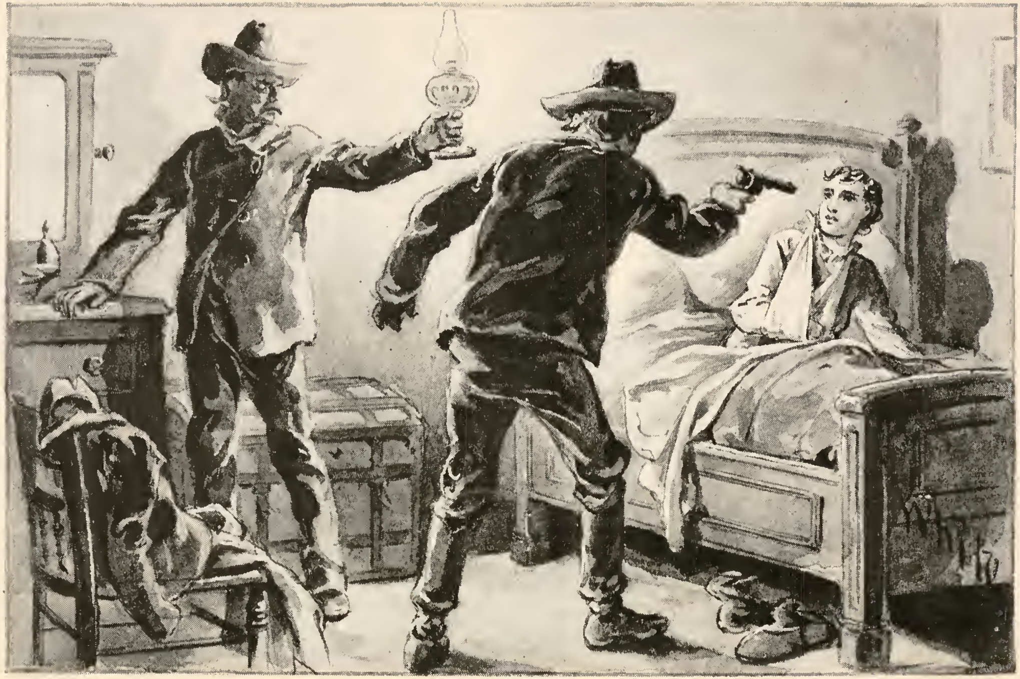

The Masked Robbers.

you is all right," said the man who held the revolver. "Make a noise, and you is all wrong, kase you'll be dead quick's a cat can bat her eye. You heah me? Git up!"

Any sense of fear that might have come upon Marcy Gray, if he had been given time to think twice, was lost in profound astonishment. The man talked like a negro; but in those days negroes were not given to doing desperate deeds of this sort. Hardly realizing what he was doing, Marcy threw off the bedclothes and sat up; and as he did so, the man who had turned up the lamp snatched the pillows from the bed and took possession of the brace of revolvers he found under them. Marcy looked at the pillows that were flung upon the floor, and saw that there were dark stains on both of them. He took short, searching glances at the two men, and saw the white showing through the black on their faces. By this time he was wide awake, and trying to nerve himself for the ordeal he saw before him.

"Git up an' climb into them dry-goods of yourn" commanded the robber, standing first upon one foot and then on the other, and swaying about after the manner of a field hand who had suddenly found himself in an embarrassing situation. "Git into 'em lively, I tol' you, chile. I is de oberseer now, an' you is de niggah. Hustle 'em on."

"How do you expect me to dress rapidly with only one hand to work with?" demanded Marcy, who was not frightened out of his senses, even if he was powerless. "You must give me a little time."

"Well den, what for you go in the wah an' fight the Yankees what want to give us pore niggahs our freedom?" said the robber. "You done got your arm broke, an' it serves you jes right. Wisht it had been your head."

Marcy dressed in much less time than he generally did, and when he had thrown his coat over his shoulders and slipped his well arm into one of the sleeves, he was ready to follow the robbers downstairs and into the cellar; for he thought that was where he would have to go sooner or later. He drew a long breath of relief when he was conducted into the sitting-room, where his mother was waiting for him guarded by two more robbers, whose hands and faces were covered with something that looked like shoe-blacking. Although she was pale she did not appear to be badly frightened, for she smiled pleasantly as the boy seated himself on the sofa by her side, and said:

"I hope they did not handle you very roughly, Marcy."

"Oh, no; they didn't put a hand on me."

"An' what's more, missus, we aint going to, if you do jes like we tell you," said the robber who had thus far done the talking. "You white folks is rich, an' we black ones is pore. You've got money, an' we aint got none."

"And you want us to give you some, I suppose," added Marcy, putting his hand into his pocket and drawing forth the small buckskin purse in which he carried his change. "There's my pile. How much have you, mother?"

"Look a-here!" exclaimed the man, forgetting himself in his rage and speaking in his ordinary tone of voice. "That won't go down. You've got more, an' we know it; an' if you don't trot it out without no more of this foolishness——"

"So far as I know, these purses contain every cent of money there is in the house or about it," interrupted Marcy, taking both the articles in question in his hand and extending them toward the robber. "The darkies may have some, but if they have I don't know it."

With a muttered curse the man hit Marcy's hand a heavy blow and sent the purses flying to the farthest corner of the room. He expended so much strength in the blow that he almost pulled the boy from his seat on the sofa, and drew an involuntary exclamation of surprise and indignation from his mother.

"Look a-here, ole woman! You'll say 'Oh, my dear boy!' a good many times afore we uns is done with you if you don't trot out that money," declared the robber, in savage tones. "We know jes what we're doing, an' you might as well give in without wasting no more time over it. Where is it? I ask you for the last time."

"It is in those purses," replied Marcy. "If you want it, go and pick them up. You knocked them there."

"We'll take some of that there sass out of you in two minutes by the watch," snarled the robber, glancing up at the heavy chandelier which depended from the center of the high ceiling. "Where's that rope, Jim? Do you reckon that there thing will pull out or not?"

"What are you ruffians going to do?" gasped Mrs. Gray, when she saw the man Jim pull a rope from his pocket.

"We're going to see if we can choke some sense into this boy of yourn," was the answer. "If you don't want to see him hung up afore your face an' eyes, make him tell where that money is. We uns have got to have it afore you see the last of us."

Mrs. Gray turned an appealing look upon Marcy, who said stoutly:

"I told nothing but the truth when I said that there is no money in the house except the little in those purses. Why don't you men look around and satisfy yourselves of the fact?"

"We aint got time, an' more'n that, we've knocked off work for the night. Throw one end of the rope over that thing up there, an' make a running noose in the other. I said I wouldn't ask him agin, an' I meant every word of it."

Things began to look serious, and the resolute expression on Marcy's pale face showed that he understood the situation. His mother knew he told the truth—that he had secretly removed her treasure to another hiding-place, and she longed to throw herself upon his neck and beg him to tell what he had done with it. But she did not do it, for that would only have made matters worse. It would have encouraged the robbers and disheartened the boy, who was so calmly watching the preparations that were being made to pull him up by the neck. He knew that the men were working on a supposition; that they had no positive proof that there was money in the house; and hoped that they would soon weary of their useless demands, or that something would frighten them away. But he was obliged to confess to himself that neither contingency seemed likely to happen. The robbers acted as though they were in earnest, and there was nothing to interfere with their work. None of the servants had showed themselves, and even Julius and Bose, who never failed to be on hand when there was anything unusual going on, had not once been seen or heard. The house was as silent as if it had been deserted. After a few unsuccessful attempts the man Jim managed to throw the rope over one of the branches of the chandelier at the same time that a second robber finished the work of putting a running noose on the other end.

"Now I reckon we're about ready for business," said the leader grimly. "Mebbe you'd best bear down on it first, Jim, to see if the thing will hold you up."

Jim's prompt obedience came near costing him his life. Seizing the rope with both hands he jerked his knees up toward his chin and swung himself clear of the floor; whereupon the hook which held the chandelier, and which was not intended to support so heavy a weight, was torn from its socket and the ponderous fixture came down upon the head of the robber, crushing him, bleeding and senseless, to the floor. But the room was not left in darkness, as Marcy wished it had been; for the single lamp that lighted it was on a side table, safely out of the way. Every one in the room was struck motionless and speechless with amazement and alarm, and if Marcy Gray had only had two good hands to use, the disaster to the robber band would have been greater than it was. Their leader was so nearly paralyzed with astonishment that a quick, dexterous fellow, such as Marcy usually was, could have prostrated and disarmed him with very little trouble; but under the circumstances it would have been foolhardy to attempt it.

As was to have been expected, Mrs. Gray was the first to recover herself and the first to act. In less than two seconds after the robber struck the floor she was by his side, trying with both hands to remove the chandelier from his prostrate form. The sight brought Marcy to his senses.

"Are you lubbers going to stand there and let the man die before your eyes?" he shouted.

"Why don't you bear a hand and get him out?"

These words proved to be almost as magical as the "whistle shrill" with which Roderick Dhu was wont to summon his Highland clan. Before they had fairly left Marcy's lips the boy Julius danced into the room through the door that led into the hall, shouting at the top of his voice:

"Here dey is! Here dey is! Shoot——" Then he stopped stock still, and rolled the whites of his eyes toward the wreck in the middle of the floor—the shattered lamps, the broken chandelier with the robber's legs sticking out from under it—and finished by saying, "Dere's a muss for de gals to clean up in de mawnin. Why don't you shoot 'em?"

Almost at the same instant the doorway behind the prancing darky was filled by armed and masked men, who filed rapidly into the apartment, turning right and left along the wall to give their companions in the rear room to follow them. Not a word was said or a thing done until a dozen or more had entered, and then the robbers were disarmed, without the least show of resistance on their part, and the heavy chandelier was lifted off their injured and still senseless comrade. It was all done in less than two minutes, and the rescuers were about to pass out, as quickly and silently as they came, taking the robbers with them, when Mrs. Gray said:

"Will you not tell us who you are, so that we may know whom to thank for the inestimable service you have rendered us?"

"We are friends," replied a voice that was plainly disguised.

"We know it; and if that is all you care to have us know, of course we shall have to be satisfied with it," said Marcy, who had received a slight nod from one of the masked men, whom he took to be Aleck Webster. "But it's mighty poor consolation not to be able to call our friends by name. I wish you would do me another friendly act by going through that wounded robber's pockets and getting my revolvers back for me. They jumped on to me and took them away before I was fairly awake."

This request was quickly and silently complied with, and then the masked men started out again, taking the four would-be robbers with them. Mrs. Gray wanted much to ask what they intended to do with the prisoners, but a look and a few words from Marcy checked her.

"Let us show our gratitude by respecting their wishes and asking no questions," said he earnestly. "They have saved me from a choking, and if they ever want anything I can give them, I know they will not hesitate to let me know it. Good-night, friends, if you will not tell us what else to call you."

A dozen voices, which sounded strange and hollow under the thick white masks that covered the faces of the rescuers, responded "good-night," and Marcy, filled with gratitude for his deliverance, stood on the porch at the side door and saw them disappear down the lane that led through the almost deserted negro quarter. Then he walked around to the front door to see what had become of Bose, and discovered him curled up in his usual place on the mat.

"You rascal!" he exclaimed. "What

do you mean by lying here fast asleep, while——"

Marcy's impulse was to kick the dog off the mat in the first place and off the porch in the second ; but remembering how faithfully the devoted animal had served him in the past and that this was his first offence, he bent over and grasped him by the neck, only to let go his hold the very next instant. Bose was stiff and cold—as dead as a door nail.

"Poisoned!" ejaculated Marcy. "And to think that I was on the point of kicking the poor beast! I deserve to be kicked myself for doubting him. The chap who rode into the yard to-night to inquire the way to Nashville is the villain who is to blame for this. He is the fellow who captained the robbers to-night, and no doubt he was feeding Bose something, when I thought he was trying to quiet him. Poor old Bose!"

The boy's heart was heavy as he faced about and went into the house, where he found his mother pacing the floor, more frightened and agitated now than she had been at any time while in the presence of the robbers. She laid her head on Marcy's shoulder, and cried softly as he put his arm around her and led her to a seat.

"What's the good of taking on so now that the trouble is all over?" said he. "But that's always the way with a woman. She will stand up to the rack when there is need of it, and cry when there is nothing to cry for. What's the use of doing that?"

"Marcy," said his mother, "did I not tell you to let that money alone?"

"No, ma'am; you said you were afraid that if I tried to take it to a new place some one would catch me at it; but I wasn't afraid. I was sure I could do it without being seen, I knew you would sleep better if it was put somewhere else, and so, while you and every one on the plantation, except the man who was helping me, were in the land of Nod, I took the bags out of the cellar wall and put them where nobody will ever think of looking for them. Whenever you want any of it say the word, and I will see that you get it; and in the meantime, if you are asked where it is, you can truthfully say that you don't know."

"But, Marcy, the events of the night, which seem more like a terrible dream than a reality, prove conclusively that the story has got abroad; and I don't see how I can muster up the courage to pass another night in this house," said Mrs. Gray with a shudder. "How could they have got in without alarming Bose?"

"Poor old Bose will never act as our sentry again," replied the boy, with tears of genuine sorrow in his eyes; and then he went on to tell how he had found the companion and friend of his childhood dead at his post, and his mother said that she would willingly surrender the money, that had been nothing but a source of trouble to her ever since she drew it from the bank, if by so doing she could bring Bose back to life again.

"What bothers me quite as much as his death is the thought that I wanted to hurt him because he did not awaken me," said Marcy. "And one thing I should like to have explained is how those masked men happened to be on the watch on this particular night, and get here as they did just in the nick of time. I tell you, mother, I was glad to see the chandelier knock that villain endways, and if I could have snatched the weapon the robber captain had in his hand, I would have made a scattering among them."

"I don't suppose you have any idea who the robbers were?"

"I am sure I never saw one of them before. I didn't pay much attention to their voices, for I knew they would not betray themselves by talking in their natural tones, but I took notice of the way they acted and carried themselves, and was obliged to put them down as strangers. They do not belong about here."

"Marcy, you frighten me!" cried Mrs. Gray. "You surely do not wish me to think that some of our neighbors brought them here to rob us?"

"That is what I think myself, and there is no use in denying it. Didn't Shelby and Beardsley take particular pains to tell us that they would be away from home to-night? Hallo, there!" exclaimed Marcy, who just then caught sight of the boy Julius standing in a remote corner, pulling his under lip and gazing ruefully at the ruins of the chandelier. "What do you mean by keeping so quiet when you know that I want to have some serious talk with you? Come here, sir."

Julius had learned by experience that when he was addressed in this style he was to be taken to task for something, probably for lying or stealing. He could not remember that he had been guilty of telling lies very lately, but as for picking up things he had no business to touch—that was a different matter. When Julius was certain that he knew what the offence was for which he was to be reprimanded, he always tried to make it lighter by offering some sort of a confession; and he did so in this instance.

"I know I aint going steal it, Marse Marcy," he began, putting his hand into his pocket. "I jes want look at it and den I going give it back."

"So you've got it, have you?" said Marcy, who had not the slightest idea what the black boy meant. "I knew I'd find it out sooner or later. Give it to me, sir!"

The boy took his hand out of his pocket and placed in Marcy's extended palm a bright, new fifty-dollar gold piece. Mother and son looked at each other in silent amazement, both being startled by the same suspicion. Cautious as he thought he had been, Marcy had not succeeded in removing the money from the cellar to a new hiding-place without being seen. Julius knew all about it.

"What for dey make all dem sharp corners on dar?" asked the boy, pointing to the gold piece. "What for dey don't make 'em roun' like all de res'?"

"Where are the rest?" demanded Marcy. "Hand them out."

Julius obeyed, but this time he produced a twenty-dollar piece.

"Go on. Pull out some more," said Marcy.

"Dat's all," replied the boy. "When de bag bus' you and ole Morris pick up all but two, and dere dey is."

Marcy remembered now, although he might never have thought of it again, how startled he was when one of the little bags in which his mother's treasure was packed became untied in his hand, and the gold pieces rattled down upon the hard floor of the cellar. The coachman, who was working with him, was prompt to extinguish the lantern, while Marcy alternately groped for the money and sat up on his knees and listened for the sound of footsteps on the floor overhead. It seemed to him that all in the house ought to have been aroused by the racket, but when he became satisfied that such was not the case, the lantern was again lighted and the work went on. He thought he had picked up all the pieces, but it seemed he hadn't. And where was the boy Julius when this happened? That was a point that could be cleared up at some future time; but just now Marcy wanted to talk about something else.

"Where were you when those robbers came into the house?" he inquired. "Were you in bed!"

"Oh, no, sar; I wasn't in bed," replied Julius.

"Where were you?"

"I was out dar," said the boy, giving his head a circular nod, so as to include nearly all the points of the compass at once.

"Out where?"

"Jest out dar in de bresh."

"Julius," said Marcy, getting upon his feet, "are you going to answer me or not?"

"Oh, yes sar," exclaimed the boy, backing off a step or two. "I going answer ebery question you ax me. I was jest out in de gyarden."

"What were you doing out there at that time of night?"

"Nuffin, sar."

"Did you see the robbers come into the house?"

"Yes, sar; I done seed 'em come in."

"Then what did you do?"

"I jest went 'round out dar."

"And did you see those other masked men, who came in and rescued us from the power of the robbers?"

"Yes, sar, I seed dem too," replied Julius, becoming interested. "And I done tol' 'em to come in quick."

"Did you know they were out there in the garden?"

"Yes, sar; I knowed it."

"Who told you they were there?"

"Nobody."

"Julius," said Marcy sternly, "I am going to know all about this. I shall give you no peace until you answer every one of my questions, and I shall begin by putting a grubbing-hoe into your hands at daylight in the morning. Have you any more money in your pockets?"

"No, sar; I gib you de lastest I got."

"Then hurry off to bed and be ready to go to work when I call you."

"Well, sar, Marse Marcy," said the boy, plunging his hands into his pockets and swinging himself about the room as if he was in no particular hurry to go to bed, "if you wuk Julius till he plum dead you can't make him tell what he don't know."

At this juncture a new actor appeared upon the scene. It was old Morris, who had been in the hall for the last five minutes, waiting as patiently as he could for Julius to give him an opportunity to speak to Marcy and his mother in private. His patience was pretty well exhausted by this time, and when he saw that

Julius had no intention of going away until he got ready, the coachman stepped into the room.

"See here, niggah," he began, and that was enough. Julius knew the old man, and when the latter pointed to the door he lost no time in going out of it. Morris followed him to the end of the hall and closed and locked that door behind him, and then came back to the sitting-room. He was badly frightened, and so excited that he hardly knew what he was doing, but he was laughing all over.

"How is you, missus?" said he, as he shut the door and backed up against it.

"Morris," exclaimed Mrs. Gray, "do you know who the robbers were?"

"No, missus, I don't; but I does know that they don't 'long around in dis part of the country. That Cap'n Beardsley, he brung 'em up from Newbern."

"Do you know what you are saying?" demanded Marcy. "Who told you that improbable story?"

"G'long now, honey," answered Morris good-naturedly. "Mebbe de niggahs all fools, but they know a heap. Marse Marcy, dat gal Nance didn't tell no lie when she say how that Allison and Goodwin boy come to Miss Brown's house and talk about de money, did she? And she didn't say no lie nudder when she tol' me that these men coming up here some night to get that money, did she? Aint they done been here dis night? What for the cap'n and all the rest of dem white trash gone to the Island this night? Kase they don't want to be here when the thing happen."

"Did you know that the robbers were to come here to-night?"

"No, sar, Marse Marcy, I didn't know that. I know they was coming some night."

"Well, some one must have known that they had made up their minds to come to-night and told the Union men to be on the watch for them," said Marcy.

"That's a fac'," assented Morris.

"Who was it?"

"I—I don't know, sar; 'fore the Lawd——"

"Morris!" said Mrs. Gray reproachfully.

"Yes, missus; I does know, but I don't want to tell."

"That is more like it," said Marcy. "What is the reason you don't want to tell?"

"Kase I don't want to get nobody in trouble with Cap'n Beardsley," replied the coachman; and he might as well have told the full particulars, for Marcy and his mother knew that they had one of the captain's own servants to thank for their rescue.

"And does Julius know all these things?"

"Ye–yes, sar," exclaimed Morris, becoming so angry that he could not talk half as fast as he wanted to. "Dat niggah all the time snooping around, and you nebber know when he aint hear all you saying."

"He knows that you and I removed that money," said Marcy. "He was somewhere about when that bag became untied, and here are two pieces that he picked up after we left the cellar."

Old Morris was profoundly astonished. He leaned heavily against the door, and gazed at the glittering coins in Marcy's hand as if he had been deprived of the power of speech.

CHAPTER VII.

MARCY SPEAKS HIS MIND.

"JULIUS also knew that those Union men—I don't know any other name to give to those who turned the tables on the robbers—were out there in the garden, and he told them to hurry up," continued Marcy. "Now, where were you at the time?"

"Marse Marcy," said Morris, recovering himself with an effort, "you had best sell that niggah, kase if you don't Ise bound to kill him."

"You will be careful not to touch him," said Mrs. Gray. "It is not your place to discipline any one."

"But, missus, you don't know that niggah," began Morris.

"We know that he was brave enough to send those men to our rescue, while you were too badly frightened to do anything to help us," said Marcy.

"I couldn't be two places," protested Morris. "I was in the stable looking out for the hosses. There's whar I belong."

"Did you see them when they took their prisoners away? And was that poor fellow who was knocked down by the chandelier very badly injured?" inquired Mrs. Gray.

"Pore fellow!" repeated the coachman. "No, he wasn't bad hurt. They jest chuck him in the hoss trough and he come back to his right mind mighty quick."

"I hope they did not abuse him?"

"No, missus; dey didn't 'buse him at all. They jest say 'Come along here! We fix you.' And that's all they done."

"And you did not see what became of him and the others?"

Morris replied that he watched the rescuers and their prisoners from the stable door until they disappeared in the darkness, and that was all he knew about them. And we may add that that was all any one in that house ever knew about them. Although Marcy Gray afterward became acquainted with all the men who had taken an active part in this night's work, and daily mingled with them, he never learned what they did with their captives. Indeed he never inquired, for he was afraid that he might hear something unpleasant if he did.

"If you have told all you have on your mind you can go back to bed," said Marcy, after a little pause.

"That's all," answered Morris. "I wish you a very good evening, sar—you and the missus." And he passed into the hall, closing the door behind him. Marcy waited until he heard the outer door shut, and then he walked over and took a look at the fallen chandelier.

"Wouldn't Beardsley be hopping if he knew that one of his own negroes had upset his plans?" said he. "I really believe he would be the death of that girl Nancy. Julius is wide awake, but I do wish he would not keep so much to himself, and that I could place more dependence on what he says."

"But you do not mean to put him to work?" said his mother.

"Oh, no; and the rascal knows it. He would not stay in the field two minutes without some one to watch him, and he is of use about the house. Now, go and get some sleep, mother, and I will see that things are secure."

Once more Marcy made the rounds of the building, and this time he did not find things just as they ought to be. He found how the robbers had effected an entrance. They had cut a hole through the side door so that they could reach in and turn the key in the lock and draw back the bolt. Probably Morris was hiding in the stable when they did it, too badly frightened to give the alarm; but the robbers would not have done their work entirely undisturbed if Bose had not been dead on his mat around the corner.

"If Morris and Julius knew this thing was going to happen, I do not understand why they did not warn us," said Mrs. Gray, when Marcy came back to the sitting-room.

"Because they are darkies, and darkies never do what they ought," answered Marcy. "They did not want us to be frightened until the time came, and so they stayed awake and watched while we slept. Good-night."

When Marcy went up to his room he took his pillows from the floor, and put them on the bed where they belonged. He pushed his revolvers under them, smiling grimly when he thought of the little use they had been to him when their services were really needed, turned down the lamp, and was about to throw himself upon his couch, without removing his clothes, when he heard something that had startled him once before—the noise made by a pebble striking against his window. That was the way in which Sailor Jack attracted his attention on the night he came up from Newbern, after piloting that Northern blockade runner safely into port; but who could this person be? The dread of danger, that was uppermost in his mind when he stepped to the window and opened it, gave way to indignation when he looked out and saw the boy Julius standing on the ground below.

"Look here, you imp of darkness," he exclaimed.

"Hursh, honey, hursh!" said Julius, in an excited whisper. "Go fru de hall, and look out de oder side."

"What's out there?" asked Marcy, in the same low whisper.

"Nuffin. But you go and look."

Marcy put down the window and went, knowing that it would be a waste of time to question such a fellow as Julius. When he stepped into the hall he was alarmed to see that it was lighted up so brightly by a glare which came through the wide, high window at the other end that he could distinguish the figures on the wall-paper. He reached the window in two jumps, stood there about two seconds looking toward two different points of the compass, and then faced about, and ran down the stairs.

"Mother, mother!" he exclaimed, as he rapped on her bedroom door. "Get up and tell me what to do. Here's the mischief to pay. Beardsley's house is in flames."

"O Marcy!" was all Mrs. Gray could say in reply.

"Yes. And there's a little blaze just beginning to show above the trees in the direction of Colonel Shelby's," continued Marcy.

"This is a dreadful state of affairs," said his mother.

"I believe you; but Aleck Webster told the truth, and those Union men are bricks. Jack will be tickled to death when he hears of it."

"I hope he isn't heathen enough to rejoice over any one's misfortune. But how can I tell you what to do? What do you want to do?"

"I want to know if you will be afraid to remain here with the girls while I run over there," answered Marcy.

"Certainly not. Take every one on the place, and save what you can. But, Marcy, you cannot do any work with only one hand."

"No matter. I can show my good will. I don't expect to have a chance to save anything. The house has been burning so long that the roof is about ready to tumble in. Good-by."

Marcy buttoned his coat to keep it from falling off as he ran, caught his cap from the rack as he hurried through the hall, and opened the front door to find Julius waiting for him at the foot of the steps.

"Wake up everybody!" commanded Marcy. "Tell the girls to go into the house to keep their mistress company, and bring the men over to the fire. Hurry up, now!"

Marcy ran on in the direction of the gate, and, as soon as he was out of sight, Julius whirled around and seated himself on the lower step. He sat there about five minutes, and then rose and sauntered off toward the road.

"What for I want wake up everybody?" said he to himself. "I jes aint going take no men ober to de fire to holp save de cap'n's things, when de cap'n done sick de robbers on us. Luf him take keer on he own things; dat's what I say."

Marcy was right when he told his mother that he would not be in season to assist in saving the captain's property. The roof of the house fell in about the time he reached the road, and when he ran into the yard he could do no more than follow the example of Beardsley's frightened household, and stand by and look on while the fire burned itself out. He caught one glimpse of the captain's grown-up daughter standing beside the few things that had been saved, but she straightway hid herself among the negroes, and gave him no opportunity to speak to her. He looked toward Colonel Shelby's plantation, and saw that his house, too, was so far gone that there was no possible chance of saving it. This was the important thing that Captain Beardsley forgot, and of which we spoke a short time ago. He forgot the band to which Aleck Webster belonged, or perhaps he would have contrived some way to make them believe that the man Kelsey, and not himself, was to blame for the raid that had that night been made upon Mrs. Gray's house.

"Aleck and his friends must have had the strongest kind of evidence, or they never would have done such work as this," thought Marcy, as he turned his steps homeward after satisfying himself that there was nothing he could do at the fire. "I wish I knew what that evidence is, and how all this is going to end. I wish from the bottom of my heart that the fanatics who are responsible for this state of affairs could be in my place for a few days."

"I hope you asked the captain's daughter to come over here," said Mrs. Gray, when her son entered the room in which she was sitting.

"Well, I didn't," was the reply. "I meant to, but she didn't give me a chance to say a word to her. Let her go and bunk with Mrs. Brown, and then there will be two congenial spirits together."

By this time it was getting well on toward morning, and sleep being quite out of the question, Marcy and his mother sat up and talked until breakfast was announced. The burden of their conversation, and the inquiry which they propounded to each other in various forms, was: What should they say to their neighbors regarding the events of the night? Should they tell the story of the attempted robbery, when questioned about it, or not? There were many living in the settlement who had not been taken into Beardsley's confidence, who did not know that the Union men were banded together for mutual protection, and some of them were Confederate soldiers; and what would these be likely to do if they learned that there was a little civil war in progress among their neighbors? The situation was an embarrassing one, and Marcy and his mother did not know how to manage it.

"I am a-going to trust to luck to help me out," said the boy, who had been gazing steadily into his cup of coffee as if he there hoped to find an answer to the question that had been under discussion for the last two hours. "I don't believe there will be anything done, one way or the other, until the battle that is going to be fought at Roanoke Island is decided."

"Why, Marcy?" said Mrs. Gray, in surprise. "What direct influence can a great battle have on our private affairs?"

"I thought you wouldn't fall in with my notions, but I think I am right," replied Marcy. "If the rebels win, look out for breakers. This part of the State will be overrun with soldiers, who will shoot or drive out every one who is suspected of being friendly to the old flag, and such fellows as Beardsley and Shelby and Allison will be out in full force to hie them on. If the Federals win, as I hope they may, and occupy the Island and Plymouth and other points about here, our stay-at-home rebels will crawl into their holes, and you will not hear a cheep from them."

"But all that is in the future," said Mrs. Gray.

"And what we want to know is how to conduct ourselves to-day," added Marcy. "I know that, and, as I said before, I am going to trust to luck. I can tell better what to say after I have mingled for a few minutes with the crowd I shall meet at the post-office."

"Do any of the Union men ever go there?" inquired Mrs. Gray.

"I have seen Webster there once or twice, but as to the rest, I cannot say; for I do not know them."

"I shouldn't think they would go there for fear of being arrested."

"Who is there to arrest them?"

"I don't know; but I suppose the postmaster could bring a squad of soldiers from Plymouth, could he not?"

"Yes, but he would have to bring another squad to watch his house and store after the one that made the arrest went away," answered

Marcy. "If the Nashville people attempt to manage this thing themselves, I am afraid their town will go up in smoke."

Going to the post-office, on this particular morning, was one of the hardest tasks the boy had ever set for himself. He wished he could hit upon some good excuse for sending Morris in his place, and indeed the old fellow offered to go when he brought up Marcy's horse, adding:

"I'm jubus that they will ask you a heap of questions that you won't want to answer. They won't say nothing to Morris, kase a pore niggah never knows nothing."

"I've got to face them some time, and it might as well be to-day as next week," replied Marcy, slipping into the coachman's hand one of the gold pieces that Julius had given him the night before. "Let Julius entirely alone, and the next time you hear of any plans being laid against us, don't keep us in ignorance. Come to us at once, so that we may know what we have to expect."

"Thank you kindly, sar," said Morris, taking off his hat. "I'll bear that in mind; but you see, Marse Marcy, I didn't want for to pester you and your maw. I was on the watch."

"But you were frightened to death, and that little imp Julius was the one who helped us," thought Marcy, as he swung himself into the saddle, with the coachman's assistance, and rode away. "Well, I was frightened myself, but I couldn't run and hide."

When Marcy came to Beardsley's gate, he thought it would be a neighborly act for him to ride in and ask if there was anything he could do for the captain's daughter; but she was not to be seen. Marcy afterward learned that she had taken up her abode with Mrs. Brown, with whom she intended to remain until her father could come home and make other arrangements for her comfort. There were a few negroes sauntering around in the neighborhood of the smoking ruins, and among them was the girl Nancy, who looked at him now and then with an expression on her face that would have endangered her life if her master could have seen and understood it. The boy was glad to turn about and ride away from the scene, for it was one that had a depressing effect upon him.

"Beardsley brought it upon his own head," was what he told himself over and over again, but without finding any consolation in the thought. "It is bound to make him worse than he was before—it would make me worse if I were in his place—and nobody knows what he will spring on us next."

As Marcy had expected, his arrival at the hitching-rack in front of the post-office was the signal for which Tom Allison, Mark Goodwin, and a few others like them had been waiting. They opened the door and ran across the street in a body, highly excited of course, and all talking at once.

"What happened out your way last night?" was the first question he could understand.

"Fire," was the reply. "Didn't you see it?"

"You're right, I did," said Tom.

"Then why didn't you come out?" inquired Marcy. "I didn't see you or any other white man about there."

"I'll bet you didn't," exclaimed Goodwin. "When two houses owned by prominent men, and standing a mile and a half apart, get on fire almost at the same moment in the dead hour of night——"

"And while their owners are absent from home," chimed in Tom.

"And while their owners are away from home on business," added Mark, "it means something, doesn't it? We stayed pretty close about our hearth-stones, I bet you, for we didn't know how soon our own buildings might get a-going. Where were you when it happened?"

"I was at home, where you were," replied Marcy.

"And wasn't your house set too?"

Marcy said it was not; or if it was he hadn't found it out.

"That's mighty strange," remarked one of the group who had not spoken before.

"What is strange?" demanded Marcy. "Explain yourself."

"Why, if there was a band of marauders

about, as every one seems to think," said the boy——

"Well, there was," interrupted Marcy. "They came to our house, and made preparations to hang me up by the neck, when the——"

"Oh, get out!" exclaimed Allison and Goodwin in concert.

Marcy had pushed his hat on the back of his head and squared himself to tell the story of his adventure; but when these words fell upon his ear, he put his hands into his pockets and started for the post-office.

"Hold on," cried Tom, catching at his arm. "Don't go off that way. Tell us all about it."

"I will, if you will ride home with me so that I can prove my story," said Marcy. "When you see the chandelier that was pulled out of its place in the ceiling by the rope——"

"Were you hanging to the rope when it pulled out?" exclaimed the impatient boys.

"No. If I had been I would have a broken head now. One of the robbers put his weight upon the rope to see if it would hold me up, when the thing came down on his head and knocked him senseless."

"Well now, I am beat! Did they go off without getting any money?" inquired Tom, who would not have asked the question if he had been in a calmer mood.

"They certainly did. They never took a cent."

"And they didn't fire your house afterward?"

"Not that we know of. Our house is standing this morning."

"Who were the robbers?"

"That's a conundrum to give up," replied Marcy. "All I know is that they were white men who had made a bungling attempt to disguise themselves as negroes; but they did not put black enough on their hands and faces."

Tom Allison looked at his friend Mark, and when he moved away Mark followed him. As soon as they were beyond ear-shot of the rest of the group, Tom said:

"Let's shake those fellows, and wait for a chance to speak to Marcy alone. What do you think you make of the situation just as it stands?"

"I don't make anything of it," answered

Mark. "I can't see through it, and I don't believe Marcy told the truth."

"I do. In the first place he is not given to lying, and besides he asked us to go home with him. He wouldn't have done that if he had been telling us a funny story. I believe Beardsley sent those robbers to Mrs. Gray's house and then took himself off so that he could say he wasn't at home when the robbery was committed, just as Marcy and Jack could say they were not at home when their overseer was abducted."

"There may be something in that," said Mark reflectively. "But the captain made a mighty poor selection when he took men who permitted themselves to be scared away by the breaking down of a chandelier. A brave lot of fellows they were."

"But perhaps that wasn't what frightened them away," said Tom. "How do you account for the burning of Beardsley's house and Shelby's, while Gray's was allowed to stand?"

"I don't account for it. It is quite beyond me."

"You don't think those robbers set the buildings on fire?"

"It isn't likely, when they were in Beardsley's employ. Still they might have done it to revenge themselves for the loss of the money they expected to find in Mrs. Gray's house."

"They might, but I don't believe they did. Have you forgotten what was in the letter Beardsley received while he was in Newbern?"

"By gracious, Tom! You don't think——"

"Yes, I do. They said they would jump on him if he didn't stop persecuting Union people, and they have done it. The men who wrote that letter were the men who burned those houses."

"Tom, you frighten me. I'll tell you what's a fact, old fellow: You and I made a big mistake in calling on that old gossip Mrs. Brown. We didn't get a thing out of her beyond what we knew when we went there, and I'm going to keep clear of that shanty of hers in future. It may be your father's turn next, or mine."

"That is what I am afraid of," said Tom honestly. "And that is the reason I want to hang around and see Marcy alone—to ask if he saw anything of those Union men last night."

Marcy remained in the post-office for nearly half an hour, for he was surrounded by an excited and anxious group there, and plied with the same questions he had been called on to answer outside; but about the time that Allison and his companion were becoming so impatient that they were on the point of going in after him, he came out with his mail in his hand, and, what was a comfort to them, he came alone.

"Are you two going to ride out with me?" said Marcy, when he reached the hitching-rack, where they were waiting for him.

"We may go out some day, but not for proof," replied Tom. "What would be the use, when we know that you told us nothing but the truth? But, Marcy, you don't mean to say that those robbers were frightened from their work by the simple breaking down of the chandelier?"

"Oh, no; they had better reasons than that for letting us alone," replied the boy, who knew that he might as well tell the whole story himself as to leave them to hear it from somebody else. "A moment or so after the chandelier came down on the head of one of the robbers, a party of armed and masked men came into the room and rescued us."

It was right in the point of Tom Allison's tongue to say to Mark, "Didn't I tell you so?" but he caught his breath in time, and tried to look surprised. "Who were they?" he managed to ask.

"Didn't I say they were all masked?" inquired Marcy.

"Well, they said something, didn't they."

"They spoke about half a dozen words."

"And didn't you recognize their voices?"

"I did not. Let Mark put his handkerchief over his mouth and speak to you, and see if you can recognize his voice."

"But haven't you an idea who they were?"

"You know as much about them as I do," answered Marcy; and he knew by the expression of astonishment that came upon Tom's face that he had hit the nail squarely on the head.

"How do you explain the burning of those two houses?" inquired Mark.

"In the same way that I explain the raid that was made upon our house. The men who were responsible for one were responsible for the other."

"You don't mean to say that the robbers did it!" exclaimed Tom.

"I mean to say that they were the cause of it. If you won't ride with me I shall have to say good-by."

"What do you think now?" asked Tom, as he and Mark stood watching Marcy's filly spatter the mud along the road.

"I hate to say what I think," was Mark's reply. "I'm sorry to say it, but it is a fact that that villain holds every dollar's worth of property in this county between his thumb and finger."

"Well, he shall not hold it there forty-eight hours longer," said Allison savagely.

"How are you going to help it?"

"By writing a note to the commanding officers at Plymouth and Roanoke, and telling them what sort of a fix we are in," replied Tom.

"Don't you do it!" cried Mark. "Don't think of it, for if you do you will see worse times here than you ever dreamed of. If you are not hanged to one of the trees on the common you will be driven out of the country."

Wait a few minutes, and we will tell you whether or not Mark Goodwin had reason to be frightened at Tom's reckless words.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ARRIVAL OF THE FLEET.

MARCY GRAY had passed through the ordeal he so much dreaded, and was as well satisfied with the way he had come out of it as he had hoped to be. Of one thing he was certain: every person to whom he had spoken that morning was suspicious of him, but that was no more than he expected. Some people in Nashville believed that he had not only instigated but ordered the destruction of Beardsley's house and Shelby's, and that he could in like manner command the burning of any house in the settlement if he felt like it, and that was what he thought they would believe. He knew it wasn't so, and it troubled and vexed him to have such things laid to his charge; but how could he help it, and what single thing had he done to bring it about?

"Heaven knows I wish they would let us

alone," was what Marcy said to himself as he galloped along the road, "but I'll not stand by and see my mother worried and tormented without doing something to stop it; and if Beardsley or Shelby or anybody else tries it on, I will have him punished for it if I can."

Just then a low but shrill whistle, sounding from the woods which came down close to the road on the left hand, attracted Marcy's attention and caused him to draw rein gradually and bring his horse to a stand-still. He pulled a paper from his pocket, and while pretending to read, looked sideways toward the woods, and saw Aleck Webster making his way up through the bushes. You will remember that these two once held a short private interview at this very spot.

"Good-morning, sir," was Aleck's greeting. "We didn't like to break up your night's rest, but I suppose we did."

"You may safely say that," answered Marcy. "We never slept a wink, or even tried to, after we saw that Beardsley's house was on fire. My mother and I are sorry you did that. After you had rescued us, why couldn't you go away satisfied?"

"And let the same thing happen again?" exclaimed Aleck. "I suppose you know that Beardsley was to blame for the robbers coming to your house?"

"We don't know it, but we think so," replied Marcy.

"We had as strong evidence as we needed that he meant to do that very thing, and when he was ready to spring his plans, he found us waiting for him. Perhaps you don't know it, but your house has been watched every night for a week past."

"I wish I could find words to thank you," began Marcy.

"Belay that, if you please, sir," said Aleck hastily. "We are helping ourselves while we are looking out for you. You are Mr. Jack Gray's brother, and that is enough for me to know. Our letter brought the cap'n home in a tolerable hurry, and ought to have been a warning to him to keep still after he got here. Perhaps he will see now that we meant what we said to him."

"I certainly hope he will, for I don't want to see any more of his buildings destroyed. I suppose you had reason to connect Colonel Shelby with Beardsley's schemes?"

"You're right, we did. He was knowing to them and didn't try to stop them, and so we thought we'd best tell him not to go too far. They thought, if they left home for a spell, we would not blame them, but we were onto them all the same. They can't make a move or do a thing that we don't know it."

Marcy wanted much to ask what means Aleck and his friends used to keep themselves so well informed; who those friends were and how many there were of them; but on second thought he decided that the best thing he could do would be to listen and say nothing. He would have been glad to know what had been done with the four prisoners the rescuing party carried away with them; but as Aleck did not once refer to them, Marcy contented himself with asking about the wounded one.

"Was the man who was knocked down very much hurt?" said he.

"Oh, no. He came around all right in a few minutes," answered Aleck; and then, as if to show Marcy that he did not intend to say more on that subject, he hastened to add, "My object in stopping you was to inquire if you are satisfied with the way I have kept the promise I made Mr. Jack. I told him I would always stand his friend, and yours. You don't often get letters from him, I suppose?"

"Not often," replied Marcy, with a smile. "The mail does not run regularly between our house and the Yankee fleet."

"No, I reckon not; but if you get a chance to write to him, tell him what I have told you."

"Look here, Aleck," said Marcy suddenly. "Do the members of your band ever hang about the post-office? I know I have seen you there a few times."

"Of course; and you will, no doubt, see me there again. We have to go among people to keep suspicion away from us."

"That's what I thought," continued Marcy. "Now, are you not afraid that some one will bring soldiers there to make prisoners of you?"

"No, I don't think they will," said Aleck indifferently. "If the soldiers should come, there are men in that town who would run so fast to meet and send them back, that you couldn't see them for the mud they would kick up in the road."

"You mean that they would not permit the soldiers to molest you?"

"They wouldn't, if they could help it, for they know their town would be destroyed if they did," replied Aleck; and Marcy was frightened by the spiteful emphasis he threw into his words. "They will be sorry enough, before we are done with them, that they ever tried to break up this government. We want peace and quiet, and we're going to have 'em, if we have to hang every rebel in the country."

This was what we meant when we said, at the close of the last chapter, that we should soon see whether or not Mark Goodwin had reason to be alarmed by Tom Allison's reckless proposition. It seemed that every contingency had been thought of and provided for by the long-headed Union men who held secret meetings in the swamp, and that, if

Allison possessed ordinary common sense, he would not say a word to the commanding officers at Plymouth and Roanoke regarding the situation in and around Nashville. Marcy did not like to hear the stalwart young sailor talk in this savage strain, so he switched him off on another track, by saying:

"I want to ask one other question before I forget it: Were you the man who nodded to me last night, when you and your friends came in, and saved me from a choking?"

"I reckon so; and I was the one who got your revolvers back for you. They didn't do you much good, did they? That little nig of yours is as sharp as they make 'em. Didn't he tell you who we were?"

"He gave us to understand that he didn't know."

"That was all right. It shows that he can be trusted to keep his mouth shut. But, I am afraid, if we don't quit talking, somebody will ask you what you found in your paper that was so mighty interesting; so good-by. Don't be alarmed on account of Beardsley and the rest. I have a notion that the fear of punishment will make them let you and every other Union man about here alone after this."

Aleck disappeared among the bushes, and Marcy rode on with his eyes still fixed upon his newspaper ; but he did not see a word in it. He was thinking of the Union men, who had showed themselves brave enough to punish their enemies almost under the noses of two strong Confederate garrisons.

"They are a desperate lot, whoever they are," was his mental reflection, "and I would rather have them on my side than against me. What will be the next thing on the programme?"

There was not much work accomplished on the plantation that day, for the excited negroes, some of whom did not know a thing about the raid of the previous night until it was over, had too much talking to do among themselves, and with Morris and Julius, who held their heads high and threw on airs because they had been prominent actors in the thrilling scenes that took place in Mrs. Gray's sitting-room. Julius thought himself of so much consequence that it was all Marcy could do to persuade him to give the dead Bose a decent burial, and then he was obliged to go with him to see that the task was well done. But he was not as impatient with the black boy as he would have been if Aleck Webster had not spoken so well of him. They had visitors, too; and Marcy knew that their object in coming was not to sympathize with his mother and denounce the "outrage" as they called it, but to gain her good will if they could. As Marcy bluntly expressed it—"They would not come near us if they thought we were friendless and helpless, but they know we are not, and so they want to get on our blind side." They fairly "gushed" over the Confederate flag that was hung upon the wall of the sitting-room, but when they went away they told one another that that banner did not express Mrs. Gray's honest sentiments, and that it would not protect her or her property for one minute if the Richmond authorities would only yield to the importunities of General Wise, and send a strong force to occupy Roanoke Island and the surrounding country. If that time ever came, the general's attention should be called to the fact that one of the sons of that house was a sailor in the Yankee navy.

After another almost sleepless night Marcy Gray rode again to the post-office, to find there the same talkative, indignant, do-nothing crowd he had long been accustomed to meet at mail time. This morning, if such a thing were possible, they were more excited and angry than they had been the day before; but they did not fail to meet Marcy at the hitching-rack, or to talk to him as though they looked upon him as one of themselves. He noticed that they all held papers in their hands.

"This thing is going to be stopped now, I bet you," said Mark Goodwin, who was the first to speak.

"Do you mean the war?" inquired Marcy. "If you do, I am heartily glad to hear the news."

"I mean the war right around here," answered Mark. "It's got into the Newbern papers, and they are giving us fits on account of it. They say it serves us just right."

"What does?"

"Why, having our houses burned and—and all that."

"Do they say anything about robbery?" asked Marcy. "Or about threatening to pull a law-abiding boy up by the neck because he does not happen to have a pocketful of money with him?"

"No," replied Mark, rather indignantly; and then, seeing by the curious smile on Marcy's face that he had spoken too quickly, he added, "I suppose of course that they do say something about that outrage, but I can't tell for certain, for I have only had time to read what my papers say concerning the burning of Beardsley's house and Shelby's."

"Probably they don't refer to the way those four villains conducted themselves in my mother's house," said Marcy, in a tone of contempt. "It's altogether too insignificant a thing to have travelled as far as the city of Newbern."

"It isn't, either!" exclaimed Tom Allison, glaring savagely at Marcy. "Nothing is too insignificant to attract attention these times.

My paper says—but there it is. Read it for yourself."

"Thank you; I can't stop," answered Marcy, moving toward the office. "I'll get my own, and read it on the way home."

Contrary to his expectations he did not find a very belligerent crowd in there. The space between the counters was filled with men, and they were all talking at once; but they had learned wisdom by past experience, and however much they might have desired to threaten somebody, they were careful not to do it. They denounced Yankees and their sympathizers in a general way, and declared that it was a cowardly piece of business to burn houses while their owners were absent, but they did not mention any names. Marcy loitered about until he found that he was not going to hear anything more than he had heard a score of times before, and then mounted his horse and set out for home. Dropping the reins upon his filly's neck and allowing her to choose her own gait, he drew his Newbern paper from his pocket, and began looking for the article of which Mark Goodwin had spoken. He could not run amiss of it, for the black headlines were too prominent. They took up more than half the column, and after Marcy had run his eye over a few of the leading ones, he had a very good idea of the article itself. He read: "A Reign of Terror.—Civil War Inaugurated in a Sovereign State.—Cowardly Citizens Who Allow a Handful of Traitors to Work their Sweet Will of Them.—Armed and Masked Incendiaries Abroad at Night."

"There now!" exclaimed Marcy, when he read the last line. "That is as good proof as I want that the man who wrote this knew the whole story. Mother and I were the only white persons who saw those men, and nobody would have known that they were armed and masked if I hadn't said so. I'll bet you the paper doesn't say a word concerning the 'cowardly citizen' who sent those robbers to our house."

Swallowing his indignation as well as he could, Marcy turned his attention to the article, which ran as follows:

"We have learned, from what we think to

be reliable sources, that a reign of terror exists in certain portions of this Commonwealth that is a burning shame and a disgrace to the cowards who permit it. They claim to be loyal Southern gentlemen up there, but they will have to furnish better proof than they have thus far given before we will believe it. When the gallant Wise was placed in command of this district in December last, Secretary Benjamin desired him to bring his legion up to 10,000 strong by recruiting in North Carolina. There was reason for this order, and for anxiety regarding Roanoke and adjacent points, because as early as September, 1861, General McClellan requested the Yankee Secretary of War 'to organize two brigades of five regiments each of New England men, for the general service, but particularly adapted to coast service.' That means that he intended to turn a horde of red-hot abolitionists and nigger-lovers loose upon our almost defenceless shores. Wise saw and realized the danger, tried hard to obey Secretary Benjamin's order, and failed; and now we know the reason why. How could he make brave soldiers out of men who will permit armed and masked traitors to ride about their county of nights, wreaking vengeance upon those who are so unfortunate as to incur their displeasure? While we deeply sympathize with Messrs. Shelby and Beardsley, whose dwellings were burned last night, and wish that the incendiaries might have chosen some less out-spoken and liberal citizens as their victims, we are constrained to say that the lesson that community has received is well deserved. Now let them arouse and stamp this lawlessness out with an iron heel; and let us warn those Union men in the same breath, and all others who feel disposed to follow in their lead, that their day will be a short one. They will not be driven from the country—they will be hunted down like dogs, and hanged to the nearest tree. They will not be shot. That is the death the loyal soldier dies, but we save the rope for traitors."

"The editor's pen was so mad it stuttered when it wrote this rambling article," thought Marcy. "It couldn't talk straight. If he owned about fifty thousand dollars' worth of houses in these parts, he would not write so glibly about hanging Union men. Now, let us see what sort of language he used in denouncing the raid that was made upon our house."

He looked the paper through without finding any reference to it, but that was no more than he expected. The outrages of every description that were perpetrated upon Union people during the days of the war, by "loyal Southern gentlemen," were of so common occurrence, and of so little consequence besides, that they were never mentioned in the newspapers. The oft-expressed verdict was that Unionists had no rights that any white man was bound to respect.

"If our house had been burned and everybody in it hanged, this rebel sheet would not have said a word against it," thought Marcy, shoving the paper into his pocket and starting up his horse. "Mark Goodwin says that these things have got to be stopped now, which means that Beardsley and Shelby will set something else afoot as soon as they return from the Island. Now, let us see what it will be. Shall I show this paper to mother, or not?"

This was the question that Marcy pondered during his ride, and the conclusion he came to was that his mother had as much right to know the worst as he had to know it himself; so he handed out the paper as soon as he reached home, and rode on to the field to see how his small force was getting on with the work he had assigned it.

Then came several days of suspense that were hard to bear. Beardsley and Shelby came home as soon as they heard of the loss they had sustained, but what they had to say, and what they made up their minds to do about it, never came to Marcy's ears. They did not take the trouble to call upon Mrs. Gray. Evidently they did not think it worth while, because she could not restore to them the property they had lost; but others, who had roofs that they wanted to keep over their heads, came every day or two, although they did not bring much news that was worth hearing. About all Marcy learned was that Beardsley and his companion had returned filled with martial ardor, that they were working night and day to send recruits to Roanoke

Island, although they did not show any signs of going back there themselves. They declared that the Island was as strong as Gibraltar, and if the Yankees were foolish enough to send an expedition against it, there wouldn't be a man of them left to tell the story of the fight; and they wanted all the youngsters in the country to go there and enlist, so that they could be able to say that they had assisted in winning the most glorious victory of modern times. They were very enthusiastic themselves, and they made some others so; but Marcy Gray, who kept a close watch of all that went on in the settlement, did not see more than a dozen young men and boys fall in in response to their earnest appeals.

"It's a disgraceful state of affairs," said Tom Allison one morning, when Marcy met him at the post-office. "The Southern people deserve to be whipped, they are so lacking in patriotism."

"Did you ever think of going into the army yourself?" inquired Marcy.

"I can't go," replied Tom. "We have sent our overseer, and that is as much as we can do at present. I wanted to enlist weeks ago, but father said I must stay at home and help him manage the place."

Marcy found it hard to keep from laughing outright when Tom said this. The latter had never done a day's work at overseeing or anything else, and it is doubtful if he could have told whether or not a corn furrow was laid off straight. He was too indolent to do anything but eat, sleep, and ride about the country.

"There are plenty around here who could go as well as not," continued Tom, "and I might go myself if I could only get a commission. But I won't go as a private soldier."

"Have you tried to get a commission?" asked Marcy.

Tom replied that he had not. He did not know how to go about it, and was not acquainted with any one who could tell him.

"Then hunt up General Wise, and ask his advice," suggested Marcy. "He can, and no doubt will put you on the right track at once."

But Tom Allison was much too sharp to do a thing like that. He was well aware that enlisted men had no love for "cits" who could go into the army and wouldn't, and the promise of a colonel's commission would not have induced him to go among them. He meant to remain at home and let other and poorer men's sons do the fighting, and Marcy knew it all the while.

The latter did not put much faith in the stories that Captain Beardsley and Colonel Shelby had spread through the country, and when his mother's negroes began coming home in companies of twos and threes, he put still less faith in them. They were a sorry-looking lot, ragged and dirty; and the first thing they asked for as they crowded about the kitchen door was something to eat.

"Oh, missus, don't eber luf dem rebels take we uns away agin," was their constant plea. "Dey 'buse us de wust you eber see. Dey whop us, an' dey kick us, an' dey don't gib us half 'nough to eat. We all starve to def. We been prayin' night an' day dat de Yankees may come an' shoot dat place plum to pieces."

"But the trouble is that the Yankees can't do it," said Marcy, as he bustled about in search of bread and meat to satisfy the demands of the hungry blacks. "Captain Beardsley says the Island is too strong to be captured."

The negroes confessed that they did not know much about military matters, but they did know that there was much dissatisfaction among the soldiers composing the garrison, many of whom declared that they would make tracks for home as soon as their year was out, leaving the Confederacy to gain its independence in any way it pleased. The Richmond authorities would not help them, the people along the coast were too cowardly or too lazy to shoulder a musket, and they were not going to stay in the army and eat hard-tack while other able-bodied men stayed at home and lived on the fat of the land. They would do their duty until their term of enlistment expired, and then they would stand aside and give somebody else a chance to fight the Yankees. That was what a good many deluded and disappointed rebels thought and said about this time; but those who have read

"Rodney, the Partisan," know how very easy it was for the Confederate authorities to bring such malcontents to their senses.

But at last the time came when at least one of these vexed questions was to be solved by a trial at arms. While the scenes we have attempted to describe were being enacted on shore, others, that were of no less interest and importance to Marcy Gray and the people who lived in and around Nashville, were transpiring on the water. On the 11th day of January a formidable military and naval expedition, consisting of more than a hundred gunboats, transports, and supply ships, set sail from Fortress Monroe. Its object was to obtain possession of Roanoke Island, which the Confederates had spent so much time and care in fortifying, and which their General Wise called "the key to all the rear defences of Norfolk." Two days later the expedition arrived off Hatteras just as a fierce northeast gale was springing up, and two days after that the Newbern papers brought the encouraging news to Nashville. We say encouraging, because there was not a man or boy in town who did not honestly believe that those hundred vessels were doomed to certain and swift destruction. As in the case of a former expedition, Tom Allison was much afraid that the wind and the waves would do the work which the gunners at Roanoke Island were anxious to do themselves.

"Oh, don't I wish this wind would go down!" was the way he greeted Marcy on the morning on which the news of the arrival of the fleet reached Nashville. "Here we've gone and worked like beavers to fortify the island, hoping and expecting to give the Yankees a Bull Run licking there, and now Old Hatteras has taken the matter out of our hands, and is pounding the expedition to pieces on the shoals. Half of the enemy's tubs have gone to smash already, and the rest will go back as soon as they can. Not one of them will ever cross the bar, I tell you."

For two weeks a furious gale raged along the coast, and, during that time, Marcy Gray lived in a state of suspense that cannot be described. He could not bring himself down to work, so he went to town twice each day, and always came back to report the loss of another ship belonging to the expedition.

"Why, Marcy, if they keep on losing vessels at this rate, there will not be any expedition left after a while," said his mother one day.

"These reports are all false," declared Marcy. "I tell them to you because they are told to me, and not because I expect you to believe them. Don't worry. Those ships are commanded by Yankees, and Yankees are the best sailors in the world."

For a time it looked as though Tom Allison's prediction would be verified; for it was only after fifteen days' struggle with the elements, and the loss of four vessels, that Burnside and his naval associate, Flag-officer Goldsborough, succeeded in passing through Hatteras Inlet to the calmer waters of Pamlico Sound. It was an exhibition of patient courage and skill on the part of the Union officers and men that astonished everybody; and even Tom Allison was willing to confess that things were getting serious. There was bound to be a terrible battle at the Island, and the citizens of Nashville would hear the guns. And if the Island should be captured, as Forts Hatteras and Clark were captured, then what? The thought was terrifying to the timid ones, who straightway hid their clothing, and began carrying the contents of their cellars, smoke-houses, and corn-cribs into the woods, as they had done when the news came that Butler and Stringham had reduced the fortifications at the Inlet; but, on this occasion, Mrs. Gray's neighbors were all so busy with their own affairs that they did not have time to run over and find fault with her because she did not hide anything.

A few days of inactivity followed, during which the fleet was repairing the damages it had received during the storm, and then a hush seemed to fall upon the whole nation as the news was flashed over it that the final struggle for the possession of those waters was about to begin. The low, swampy shores of the Sound being but sparsely settled, and nearly all the able-bodied men in the country, both white and black, having been summoned to the Island, some as soldiers and the others to work on the forts and trenches, there were few to witness the grand and imposing spectacle the fleet presented as it moved into position on the evening of February 5, and dropped anchor within a few miles of the entrance to Croatan Sound; but among those few was one who was destined to bring Marcy Gray into deeper trouble than he had ever known before, and the reader will acknowledge that that is saying a good deal. It was Doctor Patten's negro boy Jonas. He lay flat behind some obstruction near the water's edge, and took in the whole scene as if it had been a review arranged for his especial benefit. He saw the waters of the Sound splash as the heavy anchors were dropped into them, and could even hear the shrill tones of the boatswains' pipes. When darkness came and shut the nearest vessel out from his view, he scrambled to his feet and hastened toward his master's house, muttering under his breath:

"Jonas been prayin' hard fur de Yankees to come, an' bress de Lawd, here dey is! Now, what Jonas gwine do?"

CHAPTER IX.

LOOKING FOR A PILOT.

BRIGHT and early the next morning the captain of one of the twenty-seven gunboats that were attached to the Burnside expedition, came out of his cabin to take a breath of fresh air before sitting down to his breakfast. He was a large, full-bearded man, had a broad and a narrow band of gold lace around each sleeve of his coat, a lieutenant's straps on his shoulders, and wore his hands in his pockets. When he went up the ladder he lifted his cap to the quarter-deck, and was in turn saluted by the acting ensign on watch.

"Anything new or strange to tell me, Mr. Robbins?" asked the captain carelessly.

"Nothing at all, sir, except that a lone contraband came off to us in a leaky skiff, when I first took charge of the deck," was the reply.

"Does he know anything?" was the captain's next question.

"I did not interrogate him, sir, only just enough to find out that he is not a pilot."

"Perhaps he knows where we can get one, so you might as well bring him aft."

A messenger-boy was sent forward to obey this order, and presently brought to the quarter-deck the lone contraband of whom the ensign had spoken, and who was none other than Doctor Patten's boy Jonas, whom we saw watching the Union vessels from his hiding-place on the beach. The captain asked him who he was and where he belonged, what his master's politics were, and why he ran away from him and came off to the fleet, and then he said:

"You told my officer here that you are not a pilot for these waters; but you must know where I can find one. There ought to be any number of them on the mainland, for I happen to know that many of you black people make the most of your living on the water."

"Dat's a fac', moster," replied Jonas, "but I aint no pilot. Dey used to be some on de mainland, but dey aint dar now. Dey up to de forts on de Island."

"All of them?" inquired the captain. "Can't you think of a single man hereabouts who knows the channel through Croatan Sound?"

"Not about here, I can't," answered the black boy, "an' I tell you dat fur de truth. Dey is all on de Island waitin' for you uns to come wha' dey is; but dey's two back in de country a piece."

"How far back in the country, and who are they?"

"It's a right smart piece, sar; twenty mile suah, an' mebbe mo'. Name Mahcy Gray an' Cap'n Beardsley, sar."

"Are they Union or secesh?"

"Well, sar, dere's Mahcy Gray, he's de best kind of a Union boy; but de other one, he's——"

"Boy!" interrupted the captain. "I don't want any boy to take charge of my ship. This is no boy's play," he added, returning the salute of his executive officer, who just then came up the ladder. "If I understand the flag-officer's plans, we are to lead one division of the fleet in the attack ; and if we go on until we are aground, and the division follows in our wake, there will be the mischief to pay, for the other vessels draw more water than we do."

"Sakes alive, moster! Mahcy Gray won't nebber run you on de groun'," exclaimed the negro, with so much earnestness in his tones that the captain turned about and listened to him. "He de bes' boy fur de Union you eber see, an' he take you right fru de Sound, wid his eyes shet, on de blackest night you eber was out in. But dat rebel Beardsley—you don't want no truck wid him. He know wha' de deep watah is mighty well, but he aint gwine to take you dar. He run you on de groun' suah's you live and breathe."

"Never mind talking about that. You called him captain a minute ago. What is he captain of?"

"Well, sar, moster, previous to de beginning of de wah he was cap'n ob a trader; but endurin' de wah he run a privateer an' blockade runner; de *Osprey* he call her."

"What?" exclaimed the gunboat captain,

so suddenly that Jonas jumped, and the executive and the officer of the deck looked surprised. "Did you call him Beardsley, and say that he commanded the *Osprey?*"

"Dat's de name, moster," replied Jonas. "He cotch some Yankee vessels outside, an' when de gunboats get too thick on de bar, he take de two big guns out, load up wid cotton, an' run de blockade."

"What was his object in taking the guns out?" inquired the captain; and the negro went on to explain what the reader already knows—that Beardsley had disarmed and disguised his little vessel in order to deceive the cruisers along the coast. If he had been captured with nothing but cotton on board, the Federal authorities would not be likely to hang him and his men as pirates, which they might have done if they had caught him while he had two howitzers on his gun-deck and a supply of small-arms and ammunition in his cabin. The gunboat captain listened attentively, and seemed very much impressed by what the negro had to say; and when the latter ceased speaking he turned his back upon him, and said to his executive officer:

"Mr. Watkins, I have wanted to meet that man for—for an age, it seems to me now. He is the villain who robbed me of the *Mary Hollins*, and ironed my crew like felons—like felons, sir, and in spite of my earnest protest." Then turning once more to the negro, he inquired, "Can you guide a squad of my men to Beardsley's house and Gray's to-night? You told me, I believe, that they live twenty miles or more inland."

"Dat's about de distance of de journey you will have to travel, sar," answered Jonas. "I kin go da', kase I know de house whar dey resides. But de cap'n don't live da' no more sense de Union men riz up in de night an' burn him out."

"I don't care how many times he has been burned out, nor who did it. What I want to know is if you can take my officers where they can put their hands on him to-night."

Yes; Jonas was quite positive he could do that.

"All right; but look here, boy," said the captain, shaking his finger at Jonas. "Tell me the truth now, or you will never see another sunrise. Are there any rebels ashore between here and the place where those two pilots live?"

"Oh, yes, sar; dere's plenty of dem at Plymouth, moster."

"I am as well aware of that fact as you are," interrupted the captain. "What I want particularly to know is if there are any cavalry scouting around who would be likely to pick up the men I shall probably send ashore to-night."

"Not now, dey aint, sar; but a while ago dey was piles of dem. Dey go round to all de plantations an' tooken away de black ones en' make 'em wuk on de forts. I wuk on dem myself."

"Consequently there may be some cavalry out there now," said the captain. "But I warn you, boy, that if you lead my men among them——"

"Who? Me?" exclaimed the negro, in accents of alarm. "'Fore de Lawd, moster, you don't think Jonas would do dat? Why, sar, Ise been prayin' fur you uns to come, an' so has all de black ones. Dem rebels kill me suah, if dey see me wid de Yankees."

"And so will I if you take my men where the rebels can get hold of them; so that will make twice you will be killed. That will do for the present, but I may want to ask you some more questions by and by. Go for'ad. Beardsley, Beardsley!" continued the captain, turning again to his chief officer, who wore an acting-master's uniform. "I remember that when I was a prisoner on board the *Osprey* I heard one of the mates address my captor by that name, and it somehow runs in my mind that this pilot we have been talking about is the same man. I made the best effort at escape that I could, but the *Hollins* was so heavily loaded that she moved through the water as though she had a hawser dragging over the stern; and besides he had the weather gauge of me. I showed him some pretty fair seamanship, and he might have given me and my men kind treatment in return for it."

"Certainly, sir," answered the executive. "A brave man always respects a brave foe."

"But he didn't, Mr. Watkins. On the contrary, when we got into Newbern, and the mob on the wharf began howling and calling us names, as they did the minute they caught sight of us, Captain Beardsley made no effort to stop them. He rather seemed to enjoy it. Give me a chance to take a good look at him when he is brought on board, and if he is the man I think he is, I want you to have him put into the brig without the loss of a moment and into double-irons besides. That was the way he served my crew. As soon as I have taken my coffee I will go down and tell the flag-officer what I have learned and what I intend to do with his permission; so I shall want my gig presently."

The captain went into his cabin, and when he came out again, a short time afterward, he was dressed in full uniform and wore his side-arms. He seemed to be in no particular hurry to leave the vessel, for although breakfast had been served and eaten, the long red meal pennant was still floating from the masthead, and the blue-jackets were smoking their pipes on the forecastle; but Jonas was loitering around, looking as happy as a darky always does after he has enjoyed a hearty repast, and when he saw the captain beckoning to him he came aft. What the Union officer wanted to question him about this time was as to the quickest and safest methods that could be employed to take a company of, say fifty men, through the country to Beardsley's house and Gray's, and bring them back to the fleet. Would it be necessary for this company to march overland, or could it go the whole or a part of the way in boats? and was there any danger that the men would be forced to fight their way? Jonas answered all his questions as readily as though he had known beforehand what they were going to be; and when the captain brought the interview to a close by sending the negro forward again, he held in his hand a rude map of all the principal waterways that intersected the mainland south of Plymouth and north and west of Middletown, and had learned how the garrison at the first-named town could be easily and safely avoided. Then he stepped into his gig, which was called away when the meal pennant was hauled down, and was taken on board the flagship.

His superior officer must have approved of the plans which Captain Benton (for that was the name of the Yankee skipper who had once been Lon Beardsley's prisoner) submitted for securing the services of a pilot who was familiar with the waters through which the fleet was to sail to victory, although not very much was done toward carrying them out until after dark. The day was not a favorable one for a movement on the part of the Union forces, for a thick fog came rolling in from the sea and covered the waters of the Sound. Once during the forenoon it lifted long enough to disclose the rebel fortifications on the Island, and the double rows of piles and sunken ships through which the *Fairy Belle* had sailed a few weeks before, with Commodore Lynch's eight boats above, and then it settled down again thicker than ever. But two of the Union commanders at least were not idle, and when darkness came to conceal its movements, the expedition which they had quietly prepared during the day put off for the shore. It consisted of four cutters filled with small-armed men, two being from Captain Benton's vessel and the others from the gunboat that lay next astern. The work of securing the pilots was to be done by two squads of twenty men each, one under command of Captain Benton's executive officer, the second being led by an acting ensign from the other vessel. Mr. Watkins's boat was first in the line and the boy Jonas, who crouched in the bow of his cutter, was the guide and pilot.

A second expedition, which put off from the flag-ship an hour later, held straight for the shore and stopped when it got there; but the one in whose fortunes we are at present most interested did not stop. It turned into the mouth of a little river which was seldom navigated, even by the fishing and trading boats that were so numerous in the Sound. It was known as Middle River; and if Jonas, who had lived upon its banks ever since he could remember, had been asked how long it was and where it took its rise, he would have been obliged to say that he did not know. But he did know that by following some of its numerous tributaries the expedition could pass in the rear of the forts at Plymouth into Seven Mile Creek, and land within a few hundred yards of Captain Beardsley's house and Marcy's. And that was just what it did.

Although the strictest silence and caution were observed, the progress of the blue-jackets was not as slow and laborious as those who knew where they were going thought it would be, and neither did they see or hear anything to be afraid of. Only once during the long hours they passed in those narrow, crooked streams did they hear a sound to tell them where they were, and that was when a distant sentry on the right bank, and a little astern of them, shouted the number of his post and called out that all was well. Then the blue-jackets drew a long breath of relief, and congratulated themselves and each other on having passed Plymouth without knowing it. Perhaps this was a fortunate thing for Jonas. It might have frightened the wits all out of him if he had dreamed of such a thing, but the two sailors who crouched by his side in the leading cutter held revolvers in their hands, and were under orders to shoot him down at the first sign of treachery. He knew, however, that they were watching him, for on several occasions, when it was found necessary to change the course of the boat in order to follow the windings of the stream, they had cautioned him to clap a stopper on his jaw-tackle and pass his instructions aft in a whisper, like any other white gentleman.

"Da' now! Da' now!" said Jonas suddenly.

"Not so loud, you black rascal," commanded one of the guards, emphasizing his words with a crushing grip on the negro's shoulder. "What's the row?"

"Cap'n Beardsley used to live right ober da', 'fore de Union men riz up an' burn' him out," replied Jonas.

"We don't care where he used to live," growled the tar. "Where does he live now?"

"Right ober da'," repeated the negro. "An' you uns got ter lan' heah on de lef'-han' side ob de bayou."

This information was duly passed aft to Mr. Watkins, who sat in the stern-sheets by the side of the coxswain, and the first cutter was turned in toward the bank, the others following close in her wake. When Mr. Watkins stepped ashore, he demanded of Jonas why he had landed the expedition in those dark woods where there was not a sign of a house to be seen ; and the negro hastened to explain that the road lay about a quarter of a mile straight ahead, and that the house in which Beardsley formerly lived stood on the other side of it. The drive-way, which ran close by the ruins of the dwelling, led into a lane that passed through the quarter ; and there, in the overseer's house, was where Beardsley lived now. This much having been learned, and a guard being left in charge of the boats, forty sailors, with Jonas and his keepers at their head, began threading their way through the thick bushes in the direction in which the road lay. Twenty minutes' time sufficed to bring them to it, but when Jonas began giving further instructions and directions Mr. Watkins interrupted him.

"Right da' is de drive-way," said he, "an' down da' is de lane dat goes fru de quarter. Look out fur de houn' dogs, an' don't waste no time in foolin', kase Beardsley's niggers say he mighty timersome sense you Yankees come on de coast, an' de fust thing you know he run out de back do' an' take to de bresh. Now, sar, moster——"

"Take the boy with you and go ahead, Mr. Burnham," commanded the executive officer. "And it might be well for you to act upon the hint he has given, and surround the house as quickly and quietly as possible. Remember the signal, and when you are done with the boy send him back to me under guard."

In obedience to these orders Mr. Burnham's squad moved through the open gate at a quick but noiseless pace, Jonas and his keepers leading the way, and in a few minutes disappeared in the darkness. Ten minutes were passed in silence, and then the angry protests of a small army of dogs, mingled with the doleful yelps of one which had been knocked endways by a savage blow from the butt of a Spencer carbine in the hands of a blue-jacket, whom he had tried to seize by the throat, arose on the still air, being almost immediately followed by a single shrill note from a boatswain's whistle. This was the signal agreed upon, and it brought to Mr. Watkins' ears the intelligence that if Captain Beardsley was in his house, he was now shut up in it and could not escape. In less than ten minutes more Jonas and his two guards were heard coming back along the drive-way at double-quick; whereupon Mr. Watkins's own squad, which up to this time had remained motionless in the road, set out at a brisk walk for Mrs. Gray's dwelling.

"This is the place where the Union pilot lives, is it?" said Mr. Watkins, when Jonas halted and pointed out the house.

"Yes, sar, moster, dat's de place. No dogs heah to pester you, kase ole Bose done killed by de robbers. I speck Mahcy Gray mighty dubersome sense dem robbers been heah, an' mebbe he fight; but you uns luf Jonas talk to him, an' dem you see him open de front do' too quick. No need to circumroun' dis house. Marse Mahcy aint gwine run off."

Mr. Watkins's men were moving toward the house while the negro was talking in this way, and now they were drawn up in line in front of the gallery by the master's mate, who was second in command, while Mr. Watkins mounted the steps and pounded upon the door with such effect that he awoke echoes in all the wide halls. The startling summons frightened old Morris so badly that he drew his head under the bed-clothes; sent Julius like a shot out of the back window and scurrying barelegged through the garden; reached the ears of a pale but resolute woman, who hastily began arraying herself in such garments as she could find in the dark, and brought out of bed an excited, determined boy who opened an upper window with a crash, and shoved the muzzles of two heavy revolvers down at the blue-jackets. This was Marcy Gray. When his eye fell upon the double line of men in front of the house he made up his mind that the robbers had come out in full force this time.

"Get out of that, or I will blow some of you to kingdom come!" said he, without a quiver in his voice. "One—two——"

"Avast there!" exclaimed the master's mate.

"Don't shoot, Marse Mahcy, honey!" cried Jonas, who thought that both the revolvers were pointed straight at his own head. "Dese yer folks all Yankees, sar; all Yankees de las' blessed one ob 'em, sar."

"Jonas, is that you?" said Marcy, who could scarcely believe his ears. "What brought you here at this hour of the night, and how came you in the company of such a gang as that?"

"If you are Marcy Gray, I beg to assure you that we are here for no evil purpose," said Mr. Watkins, who now came down from the porch and looked up at the boy. "We want to see you particularly. Come down, if you please, and let me explain."

"You're quite sure you are Union, are you?" said Marcy, who, at first, could not make up his mind that this was not a ruse on the part of lawless men to gain admission to the house; but, on second thought, he concluded that it was not, for, if they had been determined to come in, they could have done it by breaking down the doors, or smashing the windows, and that, too, without taking the trouble to call him and his mother.

"We are quite positive on that point," answered Mr. Watkins. "We belong to the Burnside expedition. You knew we were in the Sound, I suppose?"

"I am satisfied, and will be down while you are thinking about it," said Marcy, slamming the window, and hastening back to his room.

He lingered there long enough to put on a few articles of clothing, and then ran down the stairs with a lighted lamp in his hand. In the lower hall he found his mother, who was bravely striving to nerve herself to face something more dreadful than she had yet experienced. She had heard Marcy talking to the men who were gathered in front of the house, and, although she had not been able to catch any of the words that passed between them, she was somewhat reassured when she looked into her son's beaming face.

"Who are they?" she asked calmly. "Surely they do not act like the robbers, who——"

"They are Yankees from the fleet, and want to see me about something," was the excited reply. "Will you take this lamp into the parlor while I admit them?"

Certainly his mother would do that; but what could the Yankees want of Marcy at that time of night, and how did they hear of him, in the first place, and find out where he lived?

"Doctor Patten's boy, Jonas, told them, most likely; but when and where they picked him up beats me. I can't imagine what they want, either; but I will open the door for them as readily as I would for Jack," replied Marcy; and, as his mother turned into the parlor with the lamp, he went down the hall to the front door.

"Are you Marcy Gray, the pilot?" inquired Mr. Watkins, as the two saluted each other, instead of shaking hands.

"Cæsar's ghost!" was the ejaculation that trembled on the boy's lips; and then he wondered if he was to be arrested for acting as pilot for Captain Beardsley's privateer and blockade runner.

"Because, if you are, you are the man I want to see," continued the officer.

"Will you come in?" answered Marcy, who thought it best to hold his peace until he had received some insight into the nature of the business that had brought his visitor there.

The latter complied, and, when he entered the parlor, was rather taken aback to find a dignified lady there. He saluted her courteously, and, without intending to do so, added to her fears at the same time that he explained his errand, by saying:

"I beg a thousand pardons, madam, for intruding upon your privacy at this unseemly hour; but the truth is, our fleet has gone as far toward the enemy as it can go without the aid of pilots to direct its movements. The name of Marcy Gray has been mentioned to my commander, Captain Benton, and I am here to secure his services."

"Oh, sir!" cried Mrs. Gray, clasping her hands appealingly. "Would you cruelly rob me of the only son I have left, and take him into battle? He has already been sadly injured during this terrible war."

The fact that Marcy carried one of his arms in a sling had not escaped the notice of the officer, and now he looked at the boy rather sharply. There was but one conclusion to be drawn, he told himself: If Marcy got that wounded arm in battle, he must have been fighting on the Confederate side.

"I was not aware that the young man was in the service," said he coldly. "I thought he was Union."

"And so I am," exclaimed Marcy. "I have a brother in your service, and he is aboard one of your gunboats at this moment. I know, for I took him out to the fleet before the fortifications at Roanoke Island were completed. Did you speak of a Captain Benton just now? I once met a sea-captain of that name, but of course the commander of a Union war-ship can't be the man I saw insulted and abused by a mob in Newbern."

"How and when did that happen?" demanded the officer, his face exhibiting the profoundest interest.

"It was when the crew of the prize-schooner *Mary Hollins* were marched off to jail," replied Marcy. "It was no fault of mine that I saw them captured, for I am Union to the backbone. I have been persecuted on account of my principles——"

"My lad," exclaimed Mr. Watkins, taking Marcy's uninjured hand in both his own, "were you on the *Osprey* when she made a prize of the schooner *Hollins?*"

"I was," answered Marcy, becoming as excited as the officer appeared to be. "I passed as her pilot and drew pay as such; but I did duty as foremast hand most of the time, and sailed on her because I could not help myself. May I ask if you know anything about it? I do not remember of seeing you among the crew."

"I know all about it although I wasn't there," answered Mr. Watkins, whose astonishment would scarcely permit him to speak plainly. "My commander, Captain Benton, was master of the *Mary Hollins* at the time she was captured by that pirate. He is now acting volunteer lieutenant in the navy of the United States, and commands one of the finest vessels in Flag-officer Goldsborough's squadron."

Marcy Gray had never been more amazed in his life.

CHAPTER X.

BEARDSLEY IN TROUBLE.

THE profound silence that reigned in the room for a minute or two after Mr. Watkins made his extraordinary announcement, was broken at last by Marcy Gray, who exclaimed eagerly :

"If that is the man who wants to see me, I hope you will take me to him at once. I have wanted to meet him ever since that miserable day when I stood by and saw him make his gallant attempt at escape, for I have seventeen hundred dollars that belong to him—my share of the prize money his schooner sold for, you know, captain."

"Mister, if you please," said the officer, with a smile. "I used to be captain in the merchant marine, but am now executive officer of Captain Benton's vessel, and am simply Mr. Watkins."

"Mr. Watkins," interposed Mrs. Gray, "my son has saved all the money that came to him through the sale of the *Hollins*, and longed for and dreamed of the day when he could restore it to its lawful owner. When Captain Beardsley turned his privateer into a blockade runner Marcy refused to take out a venture, though by so doing he might have made his seventeen hundred dollars of prize money bring him five thousand more. Captain Benton's money is safe, and he will receive it in the same shape in which it was paid to my son. But, sir," added Mrs. Gray, seeing that the officer did not occupy the chair that had been placed for him, "I trust you will not find it necessary to take Marcy into battle."

"I really cannot see any way in which it can be avoided, madam," said Mr. Watkins truthfully. "There is bound to be a fight if the enemy stands his ground, and my vessel will be one of the foremost in it. But I hope you understand that we do not mean to keep him with us unless he wants to stay. He will be at liberty to return to you as soon as his services can be dispensed with."

"Yes, sir, I understand that," said the mother tearfully. "But a stray bullet or a shell will be as likely to strike a non-combatant as any one else. I have given one son to the service of his country, and I can give another; but when you take Marcy you take all I have."

The officer drew his hand across his eyes, as if brushing away a mist that was gathering there, and looked up at a painting over the mantel; while Marcy, knowing that the parting must come, and that it would be better to have it over as speedily as possible, began to bestir himself.

"I will have the money dug up right now," said he. "And, mother, while I am doing that, will you bring down my Union flag—not the weather-beaten one, but the other that I hoisted on the *Fairy Belle* when I took Jack out to the fleet."

"I little expected to find a Union flag down here," said Mr. Watkins, who was very much surprised. "I should think you would find it dangerous to keep one."

"So we would if the people around here

knew it was in the house," replied Marcy. "But that is something we don't publish. Your men will not bother me if I go into the garden, will they?"

"I will see that they don't," was the answer; and, while Marcy went out of the back door as if he had been thrown from a catapult, Mr. Watkins went out at the front, and Mrs. Gray hastened to her son's room with a pair of scissors in her hand. Marcy went to the coachman's cabin and felt for the latch-string; but it had been pulled in, and that proved that old Morris was inside. He pounded upon the door, and called the black man's name impatiently.

"O Lawd! Who dat?" came in muffled tones from under the blankets.

Before Marcy could answer Julius glided around the corner of the cabin, looking like a small black ghost very scantily clad in white. He had been brave enough when the robbers made their raid upon the house and there was a strong force of Union men to back him up, but now that he thought the robbers had come again to finish their work, when Aleck Webster and his friends were not at hand to lend assistance, he was very badly frightened.

"I don't suppose Morris will get up and let me in, but you will do as well as anybody," said Marcy. "Get a spade, quick, and come with me. No, they are not robbers. They are Yankees, and I am to go to the fleet with them; and that is all I can tell you. Hurry up."

While Julius was digging in one of Mrs. Gray's flower-beds under Marcy's supervision, and the quilt on his bed was being ripped to pieces, Mr. Watkins was standing in the front yard, telling the master's mate what he had seen and heard in the house. The young officer was astonished, and declared he had never dreamed that there was such Union sentiment anywhere in the South.

"I did not believe there was either, though I have often heard of it," replied Mr. Watkins, "but I believe it now. It is easy enough for us who are surrounded by loyal people to swear by the old flag, but I tell you it must take pluck and plenty of it to do it down here.

I wish some one else had been ordered to do this work, for I have taken her last prop away from that poor woman in there. She is a heroine; and as for the boy, he is as true as steel, and as brave as they make them. One can't look in his face and think anything else of him. He has gone to dig up the captain's money and will be along directly. I never thought to ask him how he got his hand hurt."

While the officer was adding to his subordinate's surprise by telling how completely Lon Beardsley had reduced Captain Benton to poverty by taking the *Hollins* from him, Mrs. Gray came down the steps with Marcy's flag in her hand and followed by three laughing darkies, who brought with them large trays loaded with something good to eat and drink—bread and butter, cold meat, and pitchers filled to the brim with the richest of milk. While the hungry gunboat men were regaling themselves and wondering at such treatment from Southerners, all of whom they supposed to be the most implacable and violent of rebels, Mrs.

Gray shook out the folds of the flag, and spread it upon the wall where they could all see it. The unexpected sight thrilled them, and every cap was lifted.

"If things wasn't just as they are, missus," said one, "we'd give it a cheer; asking your pardon and the deck's for speaking when I wasn't spoke to."

"But our guns will cheer it in the morning, and they will make more noise than we could," observed another. "Likewise asking pardon for speaking."

At this moment Marcy appeared, bundled up ready for his trip to the coast, and carrying in his hand a valise, which contained, among other things, the box that held Captain Benton's money. It was all in gold, too; for at that time gold was as plenty as scrip in the Confederacy, and Captain Beardsley, ignorant as he was on some points, was much too shrewd a man of business to take paper money when he could have what he called the "hard stuff" for the asking. Had the *Hollins* been captured one short year later, Marcy would have been obliged to take his share of the prize money in scrip, and Captain Benton might have thought himself lucky if he had received twenty cents on the dollar.

When the blue-jackets had disposed of everything there was on the trays, either by eating it themselves or putting it into the bosom of their shirts, to be divided with the guards who had been left in charge of the boats, and Marcy had stowed his Union flag in his valise, there was nothing to detain them longer. The master's mate marched the squad away while Mr. Watkins lingered a moment, cap in hand, to say good-by to the woman whose quiet courage had excited his admiration.

"Take good care of my boy, sir," said Mrs. Gray, as if she thought the officer could give Marcy a safe station in action, or protect him from the shot and shell that would soon be shrieking about his ears. "Remember he is all I have to give you."

"I'll have an eye upon him, madam, and upon your other boy as well, when I find out where he is," replied Mr. Watkins. "We are not pressing men into our service, and I know I can safely say that Marcy will be permitted to return to his home as soon as we can get along without him."

"I shall have that promise to console me during his absence," said Mrs. Gray. "Good-by, Marcy. When you come back to me I want you to be able to say that you did your duty. Oh, is there no way in which this dreadful state of affairs can be brought to an end?" she cried, once more giving way to her tears when she felt Marcy's arm closing around her waist.

"Certainly there is," answered the officer. "The Richmond authorities can end this war in an hour by telling their soldiers to lay down their arms and stop fighting the government. That would be an easy thing for them to do, and it is all we ask of them. Good-by, Mrs. Gray. I trust we may meet again under pleasanter circumstances."

The executive turned away as he spoke, leaving the young pilot alone with his mother. He did not prolong the leave-taking, but brought it to an end as quickly as he could, shook hands with the three darkies, whose laughter was now changed to weeping, looked around for Morris and Julius, neither of whom was in sight, and in two minutes more was marching by Mr. Watkins's side along the road that led past the ruins of Captain Beardsley's house. If Marcy remembered that his old captain was one of the best pilots for those waters that could be found anywhere he did not think to speak of it, nor did he take more than passing note of the fact that there was another squad of sailors standing in the road in front of Beardsley's gate. They seemed to be waiting for Mr. Watkins, for an officer walked up and exchanged a few low, hurried words with him. Marcy afterward thought that the barking of Beardsley's dogs, and the shrill frightened voices of the house servants and field-hands which came faintly from the direction of the quarter, ought to have told him that something unusual had been going on there, but he did not pay very much attention to the sounds. He was thinking of his mother.

"Very good, sir," said Mr. Watkins, in response to the officer's whispered communication. "Make all haste to the boats and shove off; but preserve silence, and keep the line well closed up."

The officer, accompanied by Doctor Patten's boy Jonas, went back to his own squad, which at once moved into the woods. That of Mr. Watkins immediately followed, led by the master's mate, the executive and Marcy bringing up the rear as before; but it was not until the men were all embarked and the four boats were well on their way down the creek, that they had opportunity to exchange a word with each other. Mr. Watkins's cutter led the way, Jonas occupying his old place in the bow, and passing his instructions to the coxswain in a whisper. The sailors bent to their work with a will, and the boats moved swiftly on their course; but the muffled oars were dipped so carefully, and feathered so neatly, that there was no sound heard save the slight swishing of the water alongside. Feeling entirely satisfied with the way in which he had carried out the instructions of his superior, Mr. Watkins settled back on his elbow in the stern-sheets and addressed Marcy in low and guarded tones.

"I remarked to one of my officers a short time ago that it must take courage, and plenty of it, to be loyal in this country; and I told the truth, did I not?" he whispered.

"One has to be more than brave to be true to his colors in this section," replied Marcy. "He has to be deceitful. I can satisfy you of that, if you think a few scraps of my personal history would be of interest to you."

Mr. Watkins answered that nothing would suit him better than to hear, from the lips of one who knew all about it, how the Union people, if there were any in that country besides his own family, managed to live among their rebel neighbors; and Marcy began and told his story, but not quite so fully as the reader knows it. He did not have time to do that, and besides he was too modest; but he easily brought his auditor to believe that the arm he carried in a sling had not been injured while its owner was fighting on the Confederate side, and also showed him that he had more reason to stand in fear of Captain Beardsley than of any other man in the settlement.

"What worries me just now is the fear that

Beardsley will in some way find out that you Yankees have taken me from my mother's house to help your vessels through Croatan Sound,'' said Marcy, who little dreamed that Captain Beardsley had been taken from his own bed for the same purpose, and was at that very moment a prisoner in one of the boats that followed astern. The night was so dark that Marcy could not have recognized the man if he had looked straight at him; and if Beardsley had seen and recognized Marcy, when the two squads came together and got into the boats on the bank in front of his house, he had made no sign. And we may add here that the privateer captain had not been treated by his captors with the same kindness and consideration that Marcy received at the hands of Mr. Watkins. The men who surrounded his house, who followed him to his hiding-place in the cellar and dragged him out by main strength, knew that he was a rebel who hadn't the manhood to treat his prisoners with any degree of kindness, and when Beardsley frantically resisted them and yelled to his darkies to put the dogs on to the

Yankees, the boatswain's mate who held him said that, if he opened his mouth again in that fashion, he would make what little light there was in the cellar shine straight through the captive's head. This threat kept Beardsley quiet, and he would not have dared to say anything to Marcy if he had had the opportunity; but he had a good deal to say about him after he got home.

"If you whip the rebels at Roanoke Island and let me go among my friends again, that man will make me no end of trouble," said Marcy, in conclusion. "He will declare that I went aboard of you of my own free will, and did all I could to help you through the Sound. It will be pretty near the truth, but all the same I don't want the story to get wind in the settlement."

"He is about the meanest two-for-a-cent outfit that I ever heard of," said Mr. Watkins, in a tone of disgust. "I am glad you told me all this, and will be sure to bear it in mind. But yours is not the only Union family in this country, I hope?"

Oh, no, Marcy said in reply. There were

many who professed to be Union, and as many more who had little or nothing to say about it one way or the other. The latter were the real Union people. Some of them held secret meetings in the swamp, and had rid Marcy's mother of the presence of one of her meanest and most dangerous enemies by coming to her plantation one night and carrying away the overseer. They also captured the four men who raided his mother's house with the intention of robbing it, and had given Marcy to understand that they were keeping a watchful eye upon him and would punish any one who persecuted him or his mother. While he was telling this part of his story another faint call from a far-away sentry gave to Mr. Watkins the gratifying intelligence that Plymouth had once more been passed in safety. Why these convenient rear water-ways were not more closely guarded by the Plymouth garrison it is hard to tell. Perhaps it was because they thought the Yankees would not venture to penetrate so far inland in small boats. They learned better when Cushing sunk the *Albemarle.*

There was little current in the river to help the cutters on their journey, but the ebb tide presently came to their assistance, and under its influence they went on their way with increased speed; still it was almost daylight when Mr. Watkins's cutter and the two immediately astern of it drew up to the gangway on the starboard quarter of Captain Benton's vessel. The executive officer and Marcy stepped first upon the grating, and Beardsley and the acting ensign who commanded the second cutter followed them up the side to the deck, where Captain Benton was waiting to receive them.

"I am aboard, sir," said Mr. Watkins, placing his hand to his cap, "and have the honor to report that your orders have been carried out to the letter. These are the pilots I was instructed to bring."

"Very good, sir," replied the captain.

At the word "pilots" Marcy Gray turned his head to see where and who the other one was, and his amazement knew no bounds when he saw Captain Beardsley's eyes looking into his own. His old commander was startled too;

for up to this moment he supposed that the object of the expedition was to capture him alone. And if he was ill at ease to know that he was wholly in the power of men whose flag he had insulted, he was terribly frightened when he found himself confronted by Marcy Gray. The latter knew too much about him and his business, for hadn't he as good as confessed in the boy's presence that he had been a smuggler? If Marcy remembered that fatal admission and felt in the humor to take advantage of it, there was likely to be trouble in store for him. The man saw that very clearly, even before the gunboat captain turned his steady gaze upon him. Then Beardsley wished that the deck might open under his feet and let him down into the hold. He cringed a moment, like the coward he was, and then tried to call a smile to his face. He remembered his old prisoner, the master of the *Mary Hollins*, and acting upon the first thought that came into his mind, he took a step forward as if he would have shaken hands with him; but Captain Benton turned on his heel and walked away. This movement must have served as a

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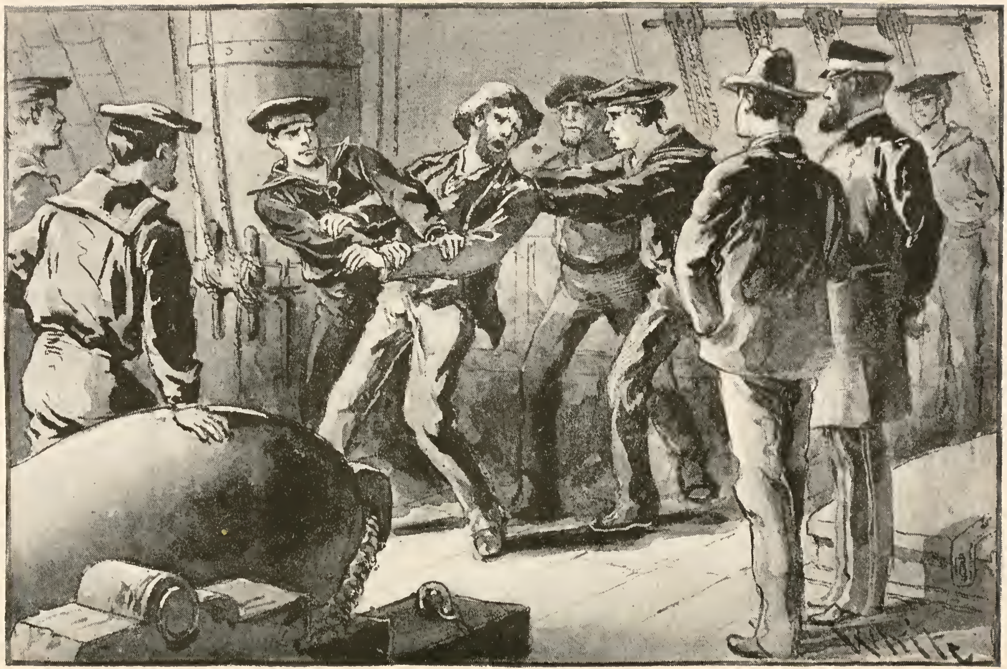


Captain Beardsley "pertests."

signal to somebody, for there was a slight but ominous jingling of chains close by, and the master at arms clasped a pair of irons about Beardsley's wrists before he could raise a finger to prevent it. The touch of the cold metal aroused him almost to frenzy.

"Take 'em off! In the name and by the authority of the Confederate States of Ameriky I pertest agin this outrage!" yelled Beardsley, hardly knowing what he said in his excitement. "Marcy Gray, aint I always stood your friend and your mother's too, and are you going to keep as dumb as an oyster while this indignity is being put upon your old cap'n? Take the dog-gone things off, I say! I aint in the service, and you aint got no right to slap me in irons when I aint done the first thing agin you or your laws, either. No, I won't keep still!" roared the captain, struggling furiously in the grasp of the sailors, who were guiding him with no very gentle hands toward the gangway that led down to the brig. "I'll pertest and fight as long as I have breath or strength left in me; and when we have gained our independence, Cap'n Benton, I'll make it my business to see that you suffer for this."

From the bottom of his heart Marcy Gray pitied the frightened, half-crazy man who was being hurried below, but he did not draw attention to himself by interceding in his behalf because he knew it would do no good. Beardsley was being treated just as he had treated Captain Benton's men; but there was no mob on the Union gunboat to whoop and yell at him as the Newbern mob had whooped and yelled at his prisoners when they were being taken to jail. Beardsley continued to struggle and shout until his head disappeared below the combings of the main-hatch, and then the racket suddenly ceased. He had not been gagged, as Marcy feared, but he had been told that he would be if he didn't keep still, and the threat silenced him.

Quiet having been restored Mr. Watkins said to his commander, waving his hand in Marcy's direction:

"This young man, sir, was also on board the *Osprey*, when she made a prize of your schooner. I think he has something to say that will interest you. His name is Marcy Gray."

"Why, Gray was mentioned to me as a Union man," said the captain.

"And so I am," replied Marcy. "But when one is surrounded by enemies he can't always do as he likes, and I sailed on that privateer because I couldn't help it. If you will be kind enough to look into this valise you will see something that will prove my words."

"He has seventeen hundred dollars in that grip, which he says belongs to you, sir," Mr. Watkins whispered in the ear of his superior. "It is the money he received when the *Hollins* was condemned and sold by the Confederate government."

Captain Benton was greatly astonished. He looked hard at Marcy for a minute or two, and then beckoned him to come into the cabin. Seating himself on one side of the little table that stood in the middle of the floor he pointed to a chair on the other side, and the boy dropped into it. The captain continued to look closely at him for another minute, and then said:

"I don't know whether I saw you on board the *Osprey* or not."

"I don't wonder at it, sir," answered the young pilot. "You had so many bitter reflections to occupy your mind, about that time, that you probably do not remember a single one of the crew with the exception of Captain Beardsley. But I remember you, sir; and when I saw you looking over the *Osprey's* stern at your own vessel which was following in our wake, I felt sorry for you. I said then that I would never spend a cent of your money, and I never have."

While he talked in this way, Marcy took the key from his pocket and opened his valise. The first thing he brought to light was his Union flag, the one his Barrington girl gave him, and which, we said, in the first volume of this series, was destined to float in triumph over the waters that he had once sailed through in Captain Beardsley's privateer. The glorious day we then prophesied had dawned at last! The captain looked on in surprise when Marcy took the flag from his valise, and shook it out so that he could see it.

"I should think your rebel neighbors, if you have any, would destroy that banner," said he.

"We have plenty of that sort of neighbors, sir, but they never saw this flag," answered Marcy. "I keep it hidden in one of my bed-quilts, and sleep under it every night." And, being a boy of business, he came at once to the subject that just then was nearest his heart. "Am I to remain on this ship when she goes into action, sir?" he inquired.

"For anything I know to the contrary, you are," the captain answered with a smile. "Of course, that will be just as the flag-officer says. Why do you ask?"

"Because, if I am, I wish you would do me the favor to run this flag of mine up to your masthead," replied Marcy. "The young lady who made it for me, and who worked upon it while her rebel relatives were asleep, would be very much gratified if she could hear that it had been carried to victory by a Federal ship of war."

"Well, my young friend, whether you stay aboard of us or not, that flag of yours shall go up to our masthead. You think we are going to beat them, do you?"

"I know it, sir," replied Marcy, so earnestly that the captain smiled again. "If they beat you to-day, you will beat them to-morrow, or next week. You are bound to win in the long run, and in their heart of hearts the rebels know it."

"It does me good to hear you talk," said the captain, getting upon his feet and pacing his cabin with his hands in his pockets. "I have been pretty well discouraged since the fleet arrived off this coast, but you put new life into me. Is that my money?" he added, as Marcy placed a good-sized box upon his table. "Am I as rich as that? You handle it as though it was heavy."

"If I haven't forgotten all my schooling, it ought to weigh close on to ten pounds, troy," answered Marcy, throwing back the cover, so that the captain could see the glittering contents. "If you will run it over, sir, I think you will find it all there."

"Good gracious, my lad! Do you take me for a bank cashier? I could not count a pile of money like that in an hour, and I have scarcely two minutes' time at my disposal now. Steward, give us a cup of coffee, and tell the officer of the deck to call away the gig. I shall want you to go to the flag-ship with me. How much did that pirate get for the *Hollins* and her cargo, any way?"

"Fifty-six thousand dollars," answered Marcy.

"That is rather more than they would have brought in Boston," said the captain reflectively. "And the Confederate government got half, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir; and half the remainder was divided between Captain Beardsley and his two mates. The other fourteen thousand were equally divided among the sixteen members of the crew, petty officers and foremast hands sharing alike, each one receiving eight hundred and seventy-five dollars."

"Then how does it come that there are seventeen hundred dollars here?" said the captain, jerking his head toward the box on the table.

"There are seventeen hundred and fifty dollars in this box to be exact—two shares," replied Marcy. "Captain Beardsley promised to do what he called 'the fair thing' by me if I would ship as pilot on his schooner, and he did it by giving me eight hundred and seventy-five dollars of your money."

"That was pretty cool, I must say. But how do you know that he did not reward your fidelity by giving you some of his own money?"

"No, he didn't, sir!" exclaimed Marcy. "Captain Beardsley doesn't reward anybody unless he thinks he sees a chance to make something by it, and neither does he pay out a cent of his own when he can take what he needs from the pockets of some one else. It is all yours, sir, and I am glad to have the opportunity to give it to you."

"And I am glad to receive it, and to have the opportunity to shake hands with such a young man as you are," said the captain; and suiting the action to the word, he came around the table and gave Marcy's hand a hearty sailor's grip.

CHAPTER XI.

MARCY IN ACTION.

MARCY GRAY was somewhat surprised, though not at all abashed, to find himself treated as an honored guest on board the gunboat. He took breakfast with Captain Benton, who did not think it beneath his dignity to acknowledge that he was glad to know he was seventeen hundred dollars richer than he thought he was, and who listened with the deepest interest to the boy's account of the various adventures that had befallen him since the war broke out. When the story was finished the captain believed with his executive officer—that it required courage to be loyal to the old flag in that country.

Breakfast over, the two stepped into the captain's gig and were taken on board the *Southfield* and into the presence of the officer who commanded the naval part of the expedition.

Flag-officer Goldsborough was a native of Maryland, but he believed that the South was wrong in trying to break up the Union, that she ought to be compelled to lay down her arms since she would not do it of her own free will, and he was doing all a brave and skilful man could to force her to strike the strange flag she had hoisted in opposition to the Stars and Stripes. He was very busy, but he found time to ask Marcy a few questions, and gave him pencil and paper with which to draw a map of the channel that led through Croatan Sound. When it was done he compared it with another that lay upon his table, and Marcy learned, from some remarks he exchanged with Captain Benton, that he was not the only pilot whose services had been secured by force of arms.

We have spoken of an expedition similar to that of Mr. Watkins, which left the fleet the night before, went as far as the mainland and stopped there. It was in search of a pilot, and it brought him, too. He was now on board the flag-ship, from which he was afterward sent to the vessel that had been ordered to lead in the attack. There was still another that Marcy did not know anything about—a negro boy named Tom, who had once called John M. Daniel of Roanoke master. He ran away on the same night the expedition came into the Sound, and had been taken on board Burnside's flag-ship. He afterward showed the general the landing at Ashby's Harbor, and told him how the troops could be placed there without being obliged to wade through the deep marshes at the foot of the Island. At the beginning of the war the Confederates did not believe that their own slaves would turn against them and give aid and comfort to the Federals; but the blacks were sharp enough to know who their friends were, and the information they were always ready to give was in most cases found to be reliable.

"There is one thing I had almost forgotten to speak of, sir," said Captain Benton, when the "commodore," as he had been called, intimated that he had no more questions to ask. "What shall I do with that man Beardsley, if you please?"

"I will give you an order to send him off to a store-ship, for of course you don't want him aboard of you in action," was the answer. "What will be done with him after we are through here, I can't say. If he had been taken with his privateer he might be held as a prisoner of war; but as it is, I presume he will be released after a while, to get into more mischief after he returns within the Confederate lines."

"But it will put him to some trouble to get back," thought Marcy. "And that will be a blessing."

As soon as the order referred to had been written, Captain Benton and his pilot took their departure. When the former stepped upon the deck of his own vessel the second cutter was called away, and Captain Beardsley was brought out of the brig to be taken on board the supply ship, where he would be out of harm's way during the fight that was soon to begin. He did not yell and struggle now as he did when the irons were first placed upon his wrists, for the fear of the gag had taken all that nonsense out of him. His face was very pale, and he walked with his head down, and did not appear to notice any of those he passed on his way to the side. When he saw how utterly dejected and cast down his old commander was, Marcy felt heartily sorry that he had said so much against him ; but after all he hadn't told more than half the truth. He had promised himself that he would shut Beardsley up for a long time if he ever got the chance, but now that it was presented, he hadn't the heart to improve it. He did just as he knew his mother would wish him to do under the circumstances—he held his peace ; and when the cutter shoved off with him, he hoped that something would happen to keep Beardsley away from Nashville as long as the war continued. But unfortunately he came back.

Marcy had not neglected to bring his binoculars with him, and finding himself at liberty after the captain went below, he walked forward to take a look at things, being accompanied by a couple of master's mates, one of whom had been second in command of Mr. Watkins's expedition, and answered to the name of Perkins. The Union fleet lay anchored in three parallel lines a short distance below the lighthouse, which stood on a dangerous shoal on the right-hand side of the channel, the gunboats being in advance, with the exception of half a dozen or more that had been drawn up on the flanks to protect the transports, in case the enemy began the fight without waiting to be attacked. A short half mile ahead of the fleet were two small vessels, the *Ceres* and the *Putnam*, whose business it was to act as picket-boats and look out for obstructions when the larger vessels were ready to move. Straight up the channel, and not more than twelve or thirteen miles away, were the double rows of piles and sunken ships that must be passed in some manner before the Union vessels could engage the Confederate squadron, which lay on the other side and close under the protecting guns of Fort Huger. His glass showed him that the rebels had steam up and were ready for action, and Marcy wondered why the Union commander wasn't doing something. He said as much to the two young officers who stood by his side, while he was making his observations.

"Wait a while," replied Perkins, with a sly wink at his companion. "After you have been in one fight you'll not be in any hurry to get into another. I can wait a week or two as well as not."

"I assure you that I am not spoiling for a fight," answered Marcy. "I'd rather not go into one ; but since I've got it to do, I wish we might get at it and have it over with." And as he said this he picked up his left hand, which had been hanging by his side, and placed it in the sling he wore around his neck.

"Look here, Perk," said the other young officer, when he observed this movement. "I'll bet you have been giving advice to one who knows more than you do. Where did you get that hand, pilot, if it is a fair question?"

"My hand is all right, but my arm was broken by one of your shells while I was running the blockade," replied Marcy, whereupon the youngsters opened their eyes, and looked at him and at each other as though they felt the least bit ashamed of themselves. "But of course you did not know anything about it, and I don't think hard of it if you took me for a greenhorn."

"I took you for a lad of spirit and courage when Mr. Watkins told me how you had been living back there in the country," exclaimed Perkins. "But of course I did not know that you had snuffed powder."

"I should think that shell would have taken your arm off instead of breaking it," observed the other.

"The shell never came near me, but a heavy splinter that was torn from our rail made me think I was a goner," replied Marcy. "The man you saw put into the brig, and afterward taken out and sent aboard the store-ship, was my old captain; and I was acting as pilot of his vessel at the time I was hit. And I am as strong for the Union as anybody in this squadron. I have a brother on one of these boats, and would like much to see him."

"You don't say?" exclaimed Perkins. "What boat is he on, and what position does he hold?"

"He is a foremast hand on the *Harriet Lane*. I hope he will make himself known to his commander, for he is the best kind of a pilot for this coast."

"I am afraid he will not be of any use to us to-day, and that you will not shake hands with him this trip," replied Perkins. "That boat is not with us. She is outside, chasing blockade runners. Hallo! There goes our answering pennant. Now, watch the signal from the flag-ship—one, nine, five, second-repeater—Aw, what's the use of my reading off the numbers when I have no signal-book to translate them for me?"

"It is '*engage the enemy*' probably," said his companion. "After we have answered it a few times more, perhaps we will recognize it when we see it."

"If that is what the signal means, why don't you go to your stations?" inquired Marcy, as they began walking leisurely toward the waist to leave the forecastle clear for the blue-jackets, who came forward in obedience to a shrill call from the boatswain's whistle, which was followed by the command: "All hands stand by to get ship under way." "You don't seem to be in any haste to do anything, you two."

"What is the use of being in a hurry to get shot at?" said Perkins. "Wait until you hear the call to quarters, and then you will see us get around lively enough. But we shall not have so very much fighting to do to-day. I heard Mr. Watkins tell the officer of the deck this morning that this battle will be merely preliminary. When the soldiers get a foothold on the Island you'll see fun, unless the rebels run away."

"Where is my station in action?" asked Marcy.

"Close at the old man's side, wherever he happens to be," replied the master's mate. "And I will tell you, for your consolation, that he always happens to be in the most dangerous place he can find. There he is on the bridge, and perhaps you had better go up to him."

The bridge was a platform with a railing around it, extending nearly across the deck just abaft the wheel-house, and when Marcy mounted the ladder that led up to it, he found himself in a position to see everything that was going on. The captain was standing there with his hands in his pockets, but he seemed more like a disinterested spectator than like a man who was about to take a ship into action, for he had not a word to say to anybody. He wore a canvas bag by his side, suspended by a broad strap that passed over his shoulder ; and if Marcy could have looked into it, he would have found that it contained a small book whose cloth covers were heavily loaded with lead. This was the signal-book—one of the most important articles in a man-of-war's outfit. The captain always kept it where he could place his hands upon it at a moment's notice, and if he found that his vessel was in danger of being captured, he would have thrown it overboard rather than permit it to fall into the hands of the enemy.

For the first quarter of an hour or so Marcy Gray had nothing to do but keep out of the way of the captain, who walked back and forth on the bridge so that he could see every part of the deck beneath him by simply turning his head, and watch the gunboats fall into line one after another. The ease and rapidity with which this was done surprised him. The several commanders knew their places and got into them in short order, and without in any way interfering with the vessels around them. If the inanimate masses of wood and iron they commanded had been possessed of brains and knew what they were expected to do, they could not have done it more promptly or with less confusion. It was a fine and inspiriting sight, and Marcy Gray would have walked twenty miles to see it any day.

"The flagship is signalling, sir," said a quartermaster who was on the bridge with him and the captain.

Marcy turned about and saw a long line of different-colored streamers traveling up the *Southfield's* main-mast. When it reached the top and the breeze had carried the flags out at full length so that the captain could distinguish them, he took down the number they represented on a slip of paper, and turned to the corresponding number in his book to see what the signal meant. This he wrote upon a separate piece of paper which he held in his hand.

By the time the vessel was fairly under way several signals had been made from the commodore's flag-ship, and finally a rattle was sounded somewhere below; whereupon the blue-jackets came running from all directions, but without the least noise or disorder, and took their stand by the side of the big guns to which they belonged. When the command "cast loose and provide" had been obeyed and every man was in his place, the roll was called by the commanders of the different divisions, the sailors responding by giving the names of their stations—thus:

"George Williams."

"First captain and second boarder, sir."

"Walter Dowd."

"Second loader and first boarder, sir."

"James Smith."

"Shotman and pikeman, sir."

When the roll had been called the various division commanders reported to the executive officer, who always has charge of the gun-deck in action, and he approached the bridge on which the captain was standing, saluted with his sword, and said:

"All present or accounted for, sir."

"Very good, sir," answered the captain, giving the officer the paper he held in his hand. "There is what the commodore had to say to us in one of his signals. Read it to the men."

Mr. Watkins went back to his station and took off his cap; and instantly the eye of every sailor on deck was fixed upon him.

"This signal has just been made from the flag-ship," said Mr. Watkins, holding the paper aloft. "Listen to the reading of it: '*This day our country expects every man to do his duty!*' What have you men to say to that? Will you show the commodore that you know what your duty is by beating those fellows up there?"

The answer was a lusty cheer, in which the officers joined as wildly as their men. Then cheers began coming from all directions, showing that the reading of the signal had had the same effect upon other crews. When the *Stars and Stripes*, the vessel that was to lead in the attack, went by to take her station at the head of the line, her men were yelling at the top of their voices; and when their cheers died away everything became quiet, and the fleet settled down to business.

The first shot was fired at eleven o'clock. It was from a hundred-pounder on the leading vessel, and was directed against Fort Bartow. It was the signal for the opening of the contest, and was quickly followed by such an uproar that Marcy Gray could hardly hear himself think. He had always thought that a twenty-four pound howitzer made a pretty loud noise, but it was nothing to the deafening and continuous roar of the heavy guns that in a moment filled the air all about him. He thought he ought to be badly frightened, and he expected to be; but somehow he was not, and neither was he killed by the shell from Fort Bartow that struck the water close alongside and exploded, it seemed to him, almost under his feet. He was in full possession of his senses, and the hand with which he levelled his glass at the Confederate fleet was as steady as he had ever known it to be. He was particularly interested in the movements of that fleet, for he was acquainted with some of the sailors who manned it. As soon as the action was fairly begun it left its sheltered position under the guns of the fort and steamed down the channel. Its leading boats came on at such a rate of speed that Marcy thought they must know of some opening in the lines of obstructions, and that they intended to come through and demolish the Union fleet without aid from the guns on shore; but if that was their object they failed to accomplish it. Their heaviest ship, the *Curlew*, was whipped so quickly that her rebel commander must have been astonished; and so badly crippled was she by the solid shot that crashed through her sides, that it was all she could do to haul out of the fight and seek refuge under the guns of the nearest fort. In the end both the ship and the fort were blown up together.

About this time something happened that the young pilot might have expected, but which he had never once thought of. The smoke of battle settled so thickly about his vessel that his eyes were of little use to him; and, to make matters worse, Captain Benton shouted in his ear:

"Keep a bright lookout, and if you see us getting into less than fourteen feet of water, don't fail to let me know it."

"I declare, I don't know whether there are fourteen or fourteen hundred feet of water under our keel at this moment!" was the thought that flashed through Marcy's mind and awoke him to a sense of his responsibility. "I don't know where we are." Then aloud he said: "I can't see a thing from the bridge, Captain. I shall have to go aloft."

The boy did not know whether or not pilots were in the habit of going aloft in the heat of action, but he thought it was the proper thing to do under the circumstances. He went, and he did not go any too soon, either; for when he had climbed up where he could see over the thickest of the smoke, he found to his consternation that the vessel was heading diagonally across the channel far to the eastward of the position in which she ought to be, that she would be hard and fast aground if she held that course five minutes longer, and that her shells were exploding in the edge of a piece of timber where he could not see any signs of a fort or breastwork. It was the work of but a few seconds for Marcy to make Captain Benton understand the situation, and when the latter had brought his ship to her proper course by following the instructions the young pilot shouted down to him, he came up and took his stand in the top by Marcy's side. There they both remained as long as the fight continued, and their dinner consisted of a sandwich and a cup of coffee, which the cabin steward brought up to them at noon.

The first object of the bombardment was accomplished about five o'clock that afternoon, when a heavy smoke was rolling over Fort Bartow, caused by the burning of the barracks, which had been set on fire by a shell from the fleet, the defiant roar of its guns being almost silenced, and its flaunting banner sent to the dust by the shooting away of the staff that sustained it, and the enemy, all along the line, had been driven so far back that the transports could come up with the troops. It was at this juncture that the services of Mr. Daniel's black boy, Tom, came into play. He piloted General Burnside's launches and lighters into Ashby's Harbor, and, by midnight, ten thousand soldiers were landed in readiness for the real battle, which was to begin on the following morning. By this time the Confederates must have been satisfied that they were going to be whipped. Commodore Lynch knew that he had had all the fighting he wanted ; for he retreated round Wier's Point, and was never seen afterward until Captain Rowan, with a portion of the Union fleet, hunted him up, and finished him at Elizabeth City. The battle was over shortly after dark (although the firing was kept up at intervals during the night), and the leading boats dropped back to allow others to take their places.

"We are not whipped, are we?" exclaimed Marcy, when he witnessed this retrograde movement.

"Oh, no," replied the captain, as he backed down from the top. "We have done just what we set out to do when we began the fight this morning, and, having won all the honors that rightfully belong to us, we must fall astern, and let somebody else have a show to-morrow."

Marcy followed the captain to the deck, and was greatly surprised by what he saw when he got there. There were wide openings in the hammock-nettings that he had not seen there in the morning, and the ports, through which two of the broadside guns worked, had been torn into one. Some of the standing rigging was not taut and ship-shape, as it ought to have been, but was flying loose in the breeze, and there were one or two dark spots on the deck which looked as though they had been drenched with water, and afterward sanded. Marcy's heart almost stopped beating when he saw these things, for they told him that the vessel had suffered during the fight, and that some of her crew had been killed or wounded, and he never knew it. But the sight of a flag which a gray-headed quartermaster was just hauling down from the masthead, drove gloomy thoughts out of his mind, and sent a thrill of triumph all through him. It was his own flag, and it had been floating over his head all day long. He took supper with Captain Benton, and afterward went below to see the poor fellows who had not come out of the fight as well as he did.

Two of them were laid in the engine-room, covered with the flag in defense of which they had given up their lives, and four others were wounded. The sight was nothing to those that his rebel cousin, Rodney, the Partisan, had often witnessed on the field of battle; but it was enough to show Marcy Gray that there was a terrible reality in war.

The next day was the army's. The battle began at seven in the morning; and although the gunboats, Captain Benton's among the rest, did the work they were expected to do and succeeded in passing the obstructions shortly after noon, the heaviest of the fighting was done by the soldiers. The Confederate flag went down before the sun did, and twenty-five hundred prisoners, forty heavy guns, and three thousand stand of small-arms fell into the hands of the victors. The Confederate fleet endeavored to escape by running up the Pasquotank river to Elizabeth City, Commodore Lynch thinking no doubt that he would there find re-enforcements, which could easily have been sent from Portsmouth; but if they were there they did not do him any good, for Captain Rowan followed him into the river the next day, and destroyed his entire squadron with the exception of one boat which was captured and transferred to the Union fleet. After demolishing a portion of the Dismal Swamp canal, Captain Rowan went to Edenton, Winton, and Plymouth, all of which were captured without resistance that amounted to anything, and garrisoned by troops from Burnside's army.

The historian says that the results of this expedition "in a military point of view, were considerable; but those of a political character did not answer the expectations of the Federal government." It was believed that the occupation of these points would not only be the means of stopping the contraband trade, which was kept up in spite of the blockading fleet, but that it would also "keep in countenance the partisans of the Union, who were thought to be numerous in North Carolina." When the capture of Newbern, Beaufort, and forts Macon and Pulaski, which followed close on the heels of the reduction of Roanoke Island, put all the coast north of Wilmington into the hands of the Federals, blockade running indeed became a dangerous and uncertain business; but Marcy Gray could not see that the native Unionists were in any way benefited. To begin with, General Burnside released all his prisoners after compelling them to take oath that they would never again serve against the United States. Does any one suppose that the prisoners had any intention of keeping that promise, or that the Confederate government would have permitted them to keep it if they had been so disposed? It is true that some of these rebel soldiers had had quite enough of the army, and vowed that they would take to the swamps before they would enter it again; but it is also true that the most of them, when they returned to their homes, became determined and relentless foes of all Union men. So the conquest of Roanoke Island gave Marcy Gray more enemies to stand in fear of than he had before; but it had a still worse effect upon his affairs.

It was night when the soldiers that were to take possession of Plymouth and garrison the place were sent ashore from the transports.

Marcy stood on the bridge, watching them as they disembarked, and wondering how long it would be before Captain Benton would tell him that his services were no longer needed and that he might return to his home; and, while he watched and thought, he discovered a small party of men on shore with bundles in their hands or on their shoulders, and who acted as though they were waiting for a chance to come off to the fleet. He knew, as soon as he looked at them, that they were Union men who were about to take the opportunity thus presented to enlist under the old flag.

"That is who they are," thought Marcy, after he had kept his binoculars pointed at them for a minute or two. "They can't be anything else, for they are in citizens' clothes. Now, in trying to better their own condition, are they not making matters worse for their families, if they have any? I wonder if I am acquainted with any of them? I will soon know, for they are heading for this ship."

The boats belonging to Captain Benton's vessel had been engaged, with all the other boats of the fleet, in taking the soldiers to the shore, and when they placed their last load of bluecoats upon the bank and were ready to return to their ship, they brought the party of which we have spoken off with them. As the leading boat drew nearer to the side, so that Marcy could obtain a fairer view of the man who sat in the stern-sheets talking to the coxswain, he uttered a cry of surprise and alarm, and almost let his glass fall from his hand. The man was Aleck Webster.

CHAPTER XII.

HOME AGAIN.

MARCY GRAY waited until the boat drew a little nearer, and then looked again. There could be no mistake about it. The man in the stern-sheets with the coxswain was Aleck Webster, the one who had promised to have an eye on Marcy and his mother while Jack was at sea, and those who composed his party were men whom Marcy met at the post-office almost as often as he went there. If they were coming off to enlist, as Marcy thought they were, wouldn't that break up the band who held meetings in the swamp? And if that band should be broken up, who would there be to stand between his mother and the wrath of Captain Beardsley? These questions and others like them passed through the boy's mind, as he came down from the bridge and stepped to the gangway to meet Aleck and his friends when they came on board. Aleck was the first to get out of the boat and mount the ladder, and when he reached the top, where the officer of the deck was standing, he touched his hat and said:

"We want to ship, sir."

"Very good," was the answer. "Stand to one side, and some one will talk to you presently."

This gave Marcy the opportunity he wanted to speak to Aleck. He moved to his side at once, and was surprised to hear Aleck say, as if he had expected to find him there:

"I was little in hopes I should have a chance to say good-by to you, sir. Where's old man Beardsley, and have you seen anything of Mr. Jack?"

"Did you know I was here?" asked Marcy.

"I knew you were in the fleet, of course, for the darkies told us about the Yankees coming ashore and taking you and Beardsley away to act as pilots," replied Aleck. "But I didn't know you were serving on this ship, if that is what you mean. Yes; we're going now where we can fight for our principles. We are tired of living in the woods."

"But who will protect the Union families if you go away?" said Marcy.

"They'll not need any one to protect them now," answered Aleck. "I talked to some of the soldiers on shore, and they told me they were here to stay; and as long as they do stay, Beardsley and Shelby and among 'em will keep as still as mice. They won't dare to do or say anything to you while there is Union cavalry scouting around through the settlement every day or two. We left thirteen men in the swamp; and whether or not they will come out and show themselves as Union men, depends on the way things look after the fleet goes away."

Marcy was on the point of telling Aleck that Beardsley had been placed in irons by Captain Benton, who was master of the *Mary Hollins* at the time she was captured by the *Osprey*, but before he could open his lips a messenger boy came up and told him that the captain wished to see him in the cabin. Marcy went, and found the captain seated at his table holding a pen in one hand and something that looked like a blank sheet of paper in the other.

"Sit down," said he, pointing to a chair. "I suppose we are as near to your home as we shall go; and as we are about to start for Newbern, where you will not be of much service to us as a pilot, I propose to give you your release unless you have made up your mind to stay with us. I should be glad to have you do it, and will advance your interests in every way I can."

"But what would my mother do without me?" asked Marcy.

"I assure you I have not forgotten her, and so I do not urge you to remain," replied the captain. "Now, how can you get home in the easiest way?"

"By boat, if I had one."

"You can have three or four if you want that many. You know that we have captured every sort of craft we could find along the shore, and you can take your pick of any of those on deck. I don't know that this will be of any use to you," said the captain, shaking the sheet of paper he held in his hand, "but I think it would be a good plan for you to take it along, for there is no telling what may happen. You don't think there is anything on it, do you? Well, there is, and it is the strongest letter of recommendation I know how to write. We are going to leave garrisons scattered all through this region, and if at any time you find yourself in trouble with them, tell the first officer you can find to hold this paper before a hot fire and read the words the heat will bring out. The letter is written with sympathetic ink, and you don't want to use it until you have to, because, after the characters have once been brought out, there is no way that I know of to make them invisible again. I am deeply indebted to you, and wish there was some way in which I could serve you."

It made Marcy sad to have the captain talk to him in this way. Although he was impatient to get home, he did not like to take leave of the new friends he had made on board that ship, for the probabilities were that he would never see them again. After thinking a moment he replied that he did not know of any way in which the captain could favor him, unless it was by taking a brotherly interest in Aleck Webster and his friends, who had come off to his ship for the purpose of enlisting.

"They are on deck now," said Marcy, in conclusion, "and I was sorry to see them come aboard. Of course they have a right to do as they please, but I had somehow got it into my head that they would stay on shore to protect those of us who are unable to protect ourselves. But Aleck thinks we do not need any one to protect us now that all these captured points are to be held by the Union forces."

"And that is what I think," replied the captain. "The commanding officer at Plymouth will not stand by and let your rebel neighbors impose on you. If they don't behave themselves, report them; that's all you've got to do."

"But you don't know how sly they are, and how hard it is to prove anything against them. The commodore as good as said that Captain Beardsley would be released."

"Of course; and Burnside probably released him at the time he paroled the prisoners we captured on the Island. When you get home you will probably find him there, but I don't think you have anything to fear from him. There's your letter, and here are a few copies of a joint proclamation by Burnside and Goldsborough, which I am instructed to scatter wherever I go," said the captain, placing a good-sized package in Marcy's hand and rising from his seat as he spoke. "Take them along, and put them where you think they will do the most good. I suppose the folks ashore think we are outlaws of the worst description."

Marcy replied that that was about the idea the people in his settlement had of Yankees, and added that he did not believe that a single article of value could be found in a plantation house within a circle of ten miles of Plymouth, everything that was worth stealing having been carried away and concealed in the swamps.

"Well, when you meet people of that sort, call their attention to the last paragraph of that proclamation," said the captain. "Now, we shall have to say good-by, for I expect to drop down the river in a few minutes."

"And you'll not forget to look out for Jack and Aleck?" said Marcy. "You know Aleck is the man who saved me from choking. And I can have my flag back, I suppose?"

"I'll have Webster sworn in this very night, and when I see the captain of the *Lane* I will tell him what I know about Jack Gray, and will say that his brother did me good service while the fleet was in Croatan and Albemarle sounds. The quartermaster will return your flag at once."

Marcy went into the state room that he had used as his own since he had been on board the ship, and when he came out he brought his valise, in which he had stowed the package the captain had intrusted to his care. The flag with which his Barrington girl presented him, and which had waved triumphant during three hard battles and several sharp skirmishes, was promptly handed out by the quartermaster on watch, and then Marcy followed the captain to the waist, to pick out the skiff that was to take him to his home. As his wounded arm was not yet in a serviceable condition, he selected a boat with a square stern, that could be sculled with one oar. After it had been put into the water, and the countersign, "Roanoke," had been whispered in his ear, Marcy shook hands all around, not forgetting Aleck Webster and the other Union men among the rest, and pushed off into the darkness. The current was strong, and Marcy hugged the bank to keep out of it as much as he could, and by so doing brought himself to the notice of half a dozen sentries who compelled him to come ashore with the countersign. Of course this was a bother, and the progress he made with his one-handed sculling was slow and laborious; but it was safer than following a lonely road and running the risk of falling in with some of those rebel soldiers whom General Burnside had sent to their homes. Marcy told himself that that was about the worst thing that could have happened to him. He was afraid that these paroled prisoners would be pliant tools in the hands of Captain Beardsley, and they were so numerous that the thirteen Union men, who were all there were left of the band that had rescued him and his mother from the power of the robbers, could not hold their own against them.

"Things will be worse now than they ever were before," thought Marcy, as he sculled his boat out of the river into Seven Mile Creek, and sat down to take a much-needed rest and eat a portion of the lunch that Captain Benton's steward had put up for him. "Beardsley will be more vindictive than ever, because I did not say a word for him when Captain Benton put him in irons, and if the truth will not answer his purpose, he'll not scruple to lie about me. He'll try his best to force me into the army so that he can have a clear field for his operations, but I'll tell you what's a fact, I'll not go," said Marcy hotly. "Jack declared that he would take to the swamp before he would fight for the Confederacy, and why shouldn't I do the same? I will. I'll become a refugee rather than shoot at the flag my brother is sailing under. Refugee: one who flees for refuge or safety. That's me, as

Dick Graham used to say. I'll seek safety among the Union men who spend the most of their time in the woods. It's my opinion that from now on they will have to spend all their time there, for I don't believe that the prisoners Burnside released will leave any houses for them to go into. Mother's will have to go with the rest."

Marcy had often made the trip from his mother's house to Plymouth and back in a rowboat, and if he thought it hard when he had two hands to use, it was doubly tedious and discouraging now that he had only one, and nothing but the most gloomy thoughts for company. He had almost made up his mind that he would camp on the bank for the rest of the night and walk home in the morning, when he was startled by hearing a low, familiar whistle, something like the chirp of a cricket, a short distance away. He listened until the sound was repeated, and then called out, in a husky voice:

"Julius!"

"Hi ya!" came the answer through the darkness; and Marcy thought he had never heard anything half so melodious as the black boy's laugh. "I done tol' dat fool niggah he didn't know nuffin, but he won't listen to Julius. Eberybody take Julius for a plum dunce; but I done fine you, Marse Mahcy, an' dere's dat Morris——"

"Where are you?" interrupted the boy. "Come here and tell me what you mean, and what brought you here so far from home."

"Nuffin didn't brung me hyar; I jes done come," replied Julius; and a slight splashing in the water indicated that he was in a boat, and that he was pushing off from the bank in the direction from which Marcy's voice sounded. "Dat fool Morris, he take de mu-el an' de filly an' done gone to Nashville lookin' for you; but I know you aint gwine come home dat a way fru all dem rebel soldiers, an' so I come hyar."

"And very glad I am to see you," answered Marcy, laying hold of the side of the dugout that just then bumped against his skiff. "You came here to meet me while Morris went to Nashville with my horse. How did you know I was coming home to-night?"

"Well, de missus say you boun' to come mighty soon, now dat de Yankees done cotch Plymouth, an' so I come hyar," replied Julius. "Howdy, Marse Mahcy!"

The latter replied that he felt pretty well but hungry, although he had just finished a hearty lunch. Julius had been thoughtful enough to provide for that, and straightway produced a basket whose contents would have withstood the assaults of two or three boys with appetites sharper than his own; and while he ate, Marcy asked a good many leading questions, in the hope of inducing his close-mouthed black friend to tell him just how things had been going at home during his absence. He learned that Captain Beardsley had returned in company with some of the prisoners who had been paroled at the Island, but so far as Julius knew he had not set any new plans afloat against Marcy and his mother. Perhaps he did not think it would be safe to do so until things became a little more settled, for among those who had been captured at Roanoke were many who were very bitter against the Confederate government, and who declared that they would fight before they would go into the army again. Some of the soldiers had stopped at the house to ask for something to eat; but others had marched by shaking their fists and yelling derisively. Marcy's heart sank when he heard that, for it proved that he had not been mistaken as to the course Captain Beardsley would pursue when the Federals permitted him to return to his home. Undoubtedly he had told all he knew about Mrs. Gray and her two sons, and it would have been just like him if he had urged the defeated and enraged Confederates to take satisfaction out of all the Union people they could find, since they had failed to beat those who had confronted them in battle. Indeed, that was what Beardsley did; and Marcy afterward found out why his scheme did not work.

Having taken the sharp edge off his appetite, Marcy told Julius to make the skiff's painter fast to the stern of his dugout and go ahead; and the sooner he reached home the better he would like it. He found it much easier to lie at full length on the bottom of his boat, and allow Julius to tow him, than it was to work his way against a strong current with one hand—so very much easier, in fact, that he dropped asleep and slumbered until the bow of the skiff touched the landing abreast of the buoy to which his little schooner was moored. The sight of her recalled to mind the last conversation he had held with Captain Benton.

"I am afraid we shall have to look up a new berth for the *Fairy Belle*," said he. "It may not be safe for her to stay here any longer, because the Yankees are taking possession of everything in the shape of a boat that they can get their hands on."

"What for dey do dat?" exclaimed Julius. "De boats aint agin de Union."

"They have been made to do service against the Union," answered Marcy, "and they can be used to carry dispatches from one side of the river to the other."

"Well, den, luf dem go down an' bus' up Cap'n Beardsley's schooner," exclaimed Julius. "She wuk agin de Union when she run de blockade."

"I know that; and I had half a notion to put Captain Benton on the track of her," said Marcy, who knew very well that he had no intention of doing anything of the kind. "That is the way he would serve me if he had a good chance. Pick up my valise and come along."

When Marcy went through the gate he missed his faithful Bose, who had always been the first to welcome him; but some of the house servants were stirring, and these greeted him as though they had never expected to see him again. They knew where he had been and what he had been doing, and had thought of and prayed for him as often as they heard the roar of the big guns, which the breeze now and then brought faintly to their ears. They made such a fuss over him that Marcy was saved the trouble of awaking his mother, whom he found waiting for him in the sitting-room.

"You told me that when I came home you wanted me to be able to say that I did my duty," said the young pilot, as his mother laid her head on his shoulder and cried softly. "I can honestly say it, and I have a letter in my pocket from Captain Benton that will bear me out in it."

"I am sorry you brought it with you," said Mrs. Gray. "The country is overrun with Confederate soldiers, and from the way some of them behave I am led to believe that they know all about us."

"I'll bet they do," said Marcy bitterly. "You know, of course, that Beardsley was carried away the same night and for the same purpose I was? Well, the Yankees did not call upon him to act as pilot, but put him in irons at once; and I am sorry to say that he was paroled at the time the other prisoners were. But you need not worry about my letter, as I shall presently show you. Sit down, and tell me what you have done to kill time since I have been gone."

To his relief Marcy found that Julius had told the truth for once in his life, and that his mother had had nothing beyond his absence to trouble her, if we except the demonstrations that some of the paroled prisoners made while they were going by the house. They had not annoyed her by coming into the yard, as they might have done if their officers had not been along to restrain them, but they had whooped and yelled and threatened in a way that was enough to frighten anybody. She said that the excitement and alarm that took possession of the people when the news came that Roanoke Island was in the hands of the invading forces, was something she would remember as long as she lived. The news must have reached Nashville and Plymouth on the night of the surrender, for at daylight the next morning the road in front of the house was filled with fugitives who were making all haste to carry their property out of harm's way. If a body of Yankee cavalry had suddenly appeared at their heels it would scarcely have caused a flutter among them, for they were panic-stricken already.

"The world is full of fools," exclaimed Marcy, undoing the string that held together the bundle of proclamations that Captain Benton had given him, "and the biggest ones I ever heard of live right around here. Didn't they ask you why you didn't pack up and run, too?"

"They did; and my reply was, that I had a son who had been impressed into the Union service; that if I went away he would not know where to look for me, and that I intended remaining in my home until he returned," said Mrs. Gray.

"Good for you, mother!" exclaimed Marcy. "You'll do. Of course, the last one of them was suspicious of you, but you couldn't help that. Now, here are some copies of a proclamation that Captain Benton gave me, with the request that I would spread them around where they would do the most good. He wished me to call particular attention to the last paragraph, and now I will see how it reads."

Seating himself by his mother's side, with a copy of the proclamation in his hand, Marcy proceeded to read it aloud. After referring to the desolating war, that had been brought on by comparatively few bad men, the last paragraph went on to say:

> These men are your worst enemies. They, in truth, have drawn you into your present condition, and are the real disturbers of your peace and the happiness of your firesides. We invite you, in the name of the Constitution, and in that of virtuous loyalty and civilization, to separate yourselves at once

from their malign influence, to return to your allegiance, and not compel us to resort farther to the force under our control. The government asks only that its authority may be recognized; and we repeat that in no manner or way does it desire to interfere with your laws, constitutionally established; your institutions, of any kind whatever; your property, of any sort; or your usages, in any respect.

"That was what Mr. Watkins told you on the night he took me away," said Marcy, when he had finished reading the proclamation. "He said that the South could end the war by laying down their arms, and General Burnside and Commodore Goldsborough say the same."

"But, my son, that is not what the secession leaders want," said Mrs. Gray. "They demand a separate government, and say they will not return to their allegiance."

"They'll have to do it, and, when they go back, they'll not take slavery with them. Mark my words. The time is coming when the darkies will be as free as we are; and I wish that time might come to-morrow, if it would only bring peace upon the land once more. I sometimes think, and hope, that I am having a horrid dream, and that I will wake up in the morning to find everything as it was before. Now, don't cry, mother. I'll not talk so any more. There's my flag as sound as it was when I took it away; but it has been in battle-smoke so thick that you couldn't see it from the deck. I must hoist Dick Graham's next, but not until it can float in a breeze that is untainted by any secession rag. That was the promise I made him when he gave me the flag, instead of turning it over to Rodney, who wanted to destroy it. Can't we have breakfast a little earlier, so that I can go to town?"

"You can have breakfast whenever you want it; but, Marcy, I am almost afraid to have you go to town," replied his mother.

"If I thought I would be in any more danger there than I am at home I wouldn't stir one step," said the boy. "I don't think it would be policy for me to keep away from those paroled prisoners, but that it would be safest for me to go among them as Captain Beardsley does. Besides, I want to hear what sort of stories that old villain has been telling about me since he came back. Now, where would be a good place to put Captain Benton's letter? We are liable to receive a visit from the Union cavalry any day, and the letter ought to be kept handy."

In accordance with Marcy's request breakfast was served as soon as it could be made ready, and during the progress of the meal Marcy entertained his mother with a glowing description of the various engagements through which he had passed on Captain Benton's vessel. Contrary to his expectations, he said, he did not feel frightened when he went into the first fight at the Island, and no doubt the reason was because he had so many things to occupy his mind; but after that he grew pale and trembled every time he heard the call to quarters, for he had a faint idea of what was before him. And the oftener he was under fire the more he dreaded the thought of going into action. His experience was like that of every soldier in this land; and when we say *soldier* we do not mean *coffee-cooler*.

Mrs. Gray became alarmed when Marcy told her how Captain Beardsley had been put in irons by the man who had once been his prisoner, for she was well enough acquainted with the captain to know that he would be revenged upon somebody for it. When he had eaten all the breakfast he wanted, Marcy mounted his mother's horse, that had been brought to the door in place of his filly which old Morris had taken to Nashville, and galloped out of the yard. The first man he saw was Beardsley, standing by the ruins of his house. The man looked up when he heard the sound of hoofs on the road, and when he discovered Marcy he beckoned him to come in.

"I've just thought of something," said the boy to himself, as he turned into the gate. "This villain is going to play off friendly, and I can't watch him any too closely. When the Yanks get to scouting through here, he will be the best Union man in the world; and who knows but he will send them to our house after Jack's rebel flag? That flag must come down the minute I get home."

Then he rode up and shook hands with Captain Beardsley, who acted as if he was glad to see him.

CHAPTER XIII.

A REBEL SOLDIER SPEAKS.

"I JUST wanted to ask you how and when you got back," said the captain, holding fast to Marcy's hand. "I see Morris over town yesterday, and right there he is going to stay till you come to ride the filly home. How did you like the Yanks, what you seen of 'em?"

"I have no reason to complain of my treatment," replied Marcy. "I had no idea that you were impressed at the time I was, until I saw you on that gunboat."

"If I'd knowed that they was going to slap the bracelets onto me, they never would have took me there alive," said Beardsley in savage tones. "I'd a fit till I dropped before I would have went a step. Who'd 'a' thought that me and you would ever seen any of them *Hollins* fellers on a war-ship? I'm mighty sorry now that I didn't stick Captain Benton in irons the same as I done with his men, and it's a lucky thing for him that he didn't let me have the handling of his ship. I would have run her so hard aground that she would be there now."

"Then it is a lucky thing for you that you were sent below," added Marcy. "You would have been hanging at the yard-arm in less than ten minutes after you ran the ship ashore. Those gunboat fellows don't stand any nonsense."

"Mebbe that's so," said the captain. "And sense I've got home all right, I'm kinder glad things happened as they did. The robbers who went to your house, after the money they didn't get, used me pretty rough, didn't they?" he added, jerking his thumb over his shoulder toward the spot on which his home had once stood. "How do you reckon they happened to know that I wasn't here to fight 'em that night?"

"That is a question I can't answer," replied Marcy, and then he waited for Beardsley to say something about the Union men who had rescued him and his mother, but that seemed to be a matter that the captain did not care to touch upon.

"Don't it beat you what sort of stories get afloat these times?" continued the latter. "There's plenty of people about here who believe you uns have got money in your house."

"I know it. I told the robbers there wasn't a cent outside of the little there was in mother's purse and mine, and asked them to look around and see if they could find any more. They preferred to choke a different story out of me, but they wouldn't have got it if they had choked me to death. If there is a dollar in the house besides what I offered them, I don't know it."

"Where's the prize-money I paid you?" asked Beardsley.

"That was safely concealed; but it wasn't what they wanted, and so I said nothing about it. They were after money which they and some other lunatics think my mother brought from Wilmington, when she went there to buy goods."

"Have you any idea who they were?"

"If I had, I would give their names to the Union commander at Plymouth before I was twenty-four hours older," said Marcy emphatically.

"I don't reckon they'll trouble you any more after the lesson they have had," said Beardsley; and then he hastened to add: "I mean they won't dare to pester you, now that the Union soldiers are here. And speaking of the Yankees reminds me of another thing I wanted to ask you. Do you reckon—aint I always stood your friend—yourn and your maw's?"

"You need not question me on that point. You know well enough how we feel over your taking me to sea when you didn't need my services any more than you need two noses," said Marcy, for once permitting his indignation to get the better of him. "But I shall not do you any mean, underhanded tricks, if that is what you mean."

"Why, Marcy, I never done you nary one," began Beardsley.

"Captain, I know you from main-truck to kelson," answered the boy, gathering up his reins as if about to ride away. "You took me from my mother for reasons of your own, not because you wanted a pilot; and you have scarcely made a move since these troubles began that I can't tell you of. You ought to let up now, and I tell you plainly that you had better."

Beardsley was astounded. His victim had turned at last, and showed that he was ready to fight. He spoke so positively, and with such easy assurance, that the man was afraid of him.

"Why, Marcy, sure, hope to die I never——"

"Yes, you have. You have been persecuting us systematically, and there's the proof of it right there," exclaimed Marcy, pointing to the ruins of Beardsley's home. "If you had quit that business two months ago, you would have a house to live in now, and so would Colonel Shelby. I believe I could have sent you to prison by telling Captain Benton a few scraps of your history, but I wasn't mean enough to do it."

"No, you couldn't," declared Beardsley, who had had time to recover a little of his courage. "I never was in the Confederate service; and even if I was, I can't be pestered for it now, kase the Yankees done let me go with the rest of the prisoners."

"You have been a smuggler, haven't you?"

"S'pose I have? I can't be hurt for that now."

"I almost wish I had tested the matter by speaking to Captain Benton about it. If I had, I don't think you would have been turned over to the army to be paroled with the other prisoners. I could have told him about the *Hattie*, couldn't I?"

"Great smoke!" exclaimed Beardsley. "I never thought of her, and there she is in the creek, where they could have picked her up as easy as you please. It was good of you not to say anything about her, and if I ever get a chance I'll show you that you and your maw have been thinking hard of me without a cause."

Beardsley turned away as if he had nothing further to say to Marcy, and the latter wheeled his horse and rode on toward Nashville, wondering if he had made a mistake in talking so plainly to his old commander.

"If I have it is too late to be sorry for it now," was his reflection. "But I don't think he can say worse things about me now than he could before. Beardsley is nobody's fool, though he does look like it, and he has known all along how mother and I feel toward him."

When Marcy reached the village he found the streets almost deserted; but he knew there was a talkative crowd in the post-office, for every time the door was opened loud and angry voices came through it. Tom Allison, Mark Goodwin, and their friends were not at hand to have the first talk with him, as Marcy thought they would be, but he found them in the office listening to an excited harangue from a paroled soldier, who had discarded his coat and hat and pushed up his sleeves, as if he were prepared to do battle with the first one of his auditors who dared dispute his words. Marcy saw at a glance that some of the crowd were very much shocked, while others were grinning broadly, and nodding now and then as if to say that the speaker was expressing their sentiments exactly. Marcy knew him well. He lived in the settlement, and had been one of the first to put on a uniform and hasten to the front; and so very patriotic was he that he was anxious to fight all his neighbors who could not be persuaded to go into the army with him. But his experience at Hatteras and Roanoke Island had somewhat dampened his ardor, and showed him that there were some things in war that he had never dreamed of.

"How does it come that you stay-at-homers know so much about this business, and about my duty as a soldier, that you take it upon yourselves to tell me what I had oughter do?" shouted the man who had heard the shrieking of Yankee shells at Fort Bartow. "I see some among you who are mighty hard on your niggers, but there aint one who is as hard as our trifling officers were on us. Having no niggers to drive they took to driving us white men, and they 'bused us like we was dogs. Many's the time I have seen men tied up by the thumbs and bucked and gagged for nothing at all; and, Tom Allison, I give you fair warning that if you say again that I'm a coward kase I don't allow to go back and be 'bused like I was afore, I'll twist your neck for ye."

This made two things plain to Marcy Gray. One was that the man had had quite enough of soldiering and that he did not mean to try it again if he could help it. The other was that his friend Allison had presumed to speak his mind a little too freely, and that that was what started the prisoner on his tirade against those whom he called "stay-at-homers." After some twisting, and turning, and elbowing Marcy succeeded in obtaining a glance at Tom.

He was leaning against one of the counters, as far away from the speaker as he could get, and his face was as white as his shirt-front.

"I'm mighty glad to hear that there's Union men among you," continued the soldier, "and if there's any here in this post-office I want them to know that there's more of 'em now nor they was a week ago, and that some of 'em wears gray jackets. And I am glad to hear that them same Union men have took to burning out them among you who was cowards enough to persecute women and children on account of their principles. Now, there's that trifling hound Lon Beardsley. He told me and some others who come up from the Island the same time he did, that we could make a pile of money by burning Mrs. Gray's house."

Colonel Shelby was one of those who listened while the angry soldier talked, but being a "stay-at-homer" he dared not interrupt him. He stood where he could look over the shoulders of some of the crowd into Marcy's face; and when the soldier spoke Beardsley's name, and told what the latter had tried to induce him and some companions to do, the colonel leaned forward and whispered a few earnest words to him. The man bent his head to listen, but as soon as the colonel ceased speaking he broke out again.

"I aint a paroled pris'ner neither," he shouted. "I took my oath that I wouldn't never fight agin the United States again, and I'm going to stick to it. I'm a free man now; I am going to stay free, and I won't shut up till I get ready. When I say that Lon Beardsley tried to get me to burn Mrs. Gray's house I say the truth, and Beardsley dassent come afore me and say different. But I told him plain that we uns who had fit and snuffed powder wouldn't do no dirty work like that. We don't care if Jack Gray is in the Yankee navy and Marcy was a pilot on a Yankee gunboat. If they was in that fight I done my level best to sink 'em; but they whopped us fair and square, and I've had enough of fighting to last me as long as I live. All the same I aint going to let no little whiffet like Tom Allison call me a coward."

While the soldier was going on in this way, pounding the air with his fists and shouting himself hoarse, those of his auditors who could do so without attracting too much attention, secured their mail and slipped through the door into the street; and when the crowd became thinned out so that he could see to the other end of the post-office, Marcy was surprised to discover that the man was not alone and unsupported, as he had supposed him to be. Six or eight stalwart fellows in uniform leaned against the counters; and the fact that they did not interrupt their comrade, or take him to task for anything he said, was pretty good evidence that he spoke for them as well as for himself. Among those who were glad to get away from the sound of his voice were Tom Allison and Mark Goodwin, who went across the road to the hitching-rack, and had time to do a little talking between themselves before Marcy came out.

"Did you ever hear a fellow go on as Ben Hawkins did?" whispered Tom, who had not yet recovered from his fright.

"It's just awful to hear a Confederate soldier talk treason like that," replied Mark. "I declare, things are getting worse every day. I thought that when our soldiers came home they would hunt the Unionists out of the country, and burn everything they've got; but, by gracious! they are Unionists themselves, or traitors to the flag, which amounts to the same thing. I tell you, Tom, you came mighty near getting yourself into serious trouble by calling Hawkins a coward. If ever fire came from a man's eyes it came from his. What in the world made you do it?"

"I called him a coward when he declared that he wouldn't fight the Yankees any more, because I thought he was one," replied Tom. "And I still think so. There were several other soldiers in there, and I supposed of course they would stand by me. They all know my father, and some of them are under obligations to him ; but instead of backing me in my efforts to make Hawkins ashamed of himself, they stood by and let him talk as he pleased. I was glad to hear him say what he did about Beardsley."

"Do you think he told the truth?" asked Mark.

"I am sure of it; for if Beardsley didn't say something to him, how would Hawkins know that there was a big pile of money in Mrs. Gray's house? I'm free to confess that I am getting scared, and if I knew any safe place around here I would go to it."

"Here, too," exclaimed Mark. "But, Tom, this state of affairs can't last long. Unless we are whipped already, and I never will believe that till I have to, these places will all be taken from the enemy, and then there can be something done toward driving from the country such fellows as Hawkins and——"

"And such fellows as this one coming," added Tom, with a slight nod toward Marcy Gray, who just then came out of the post-office.

"Won't he hold his head in the air now?" exclaimed Mark, in disgust. "If he doesn't know by this time that he is the biggest toad in this puddle, it isn't Hawkins's fault. Doesn't it beat the world how some people can hold their own with a whole settlement against them?"

Marcy Gray did not look as though he thought himself better than anybody else, but he did look astonished and perplexed. The scene he had just witnessed, and the words to which he had listened, almost dazed him. If any one had told him that such sentiments could be uttered in a town like Nashville, nine out of ten of whose citizens were supposed to be good Confederates, without a tragedy following close upon the heels of it, he would have thought the statement an absurd one for any sane man to make. Marcy knew then, as well as he did when he afterward read it in one of his papers, that the people of North Carolina were not ardently devoted to the Confederate cause. In fact "they did not care much for either party; but while a large number of them would have liked to wait for the issue of the struggle to declare their preferences, those who remained loyal to the flag of the Union were too much afraid of a turn of fortune to avow their sentiments openly." But it seemed that Hawkins was not afraid to say what he thought of the situation, and only one of the rebels who listened to his speech in the post-office had dared dissent from his views. That was Tom Allison, who came near having his neck "twisted" for his impudence.

"You look surprised, old fellow," was the way in which Tom greeted Marcy when he came up.

"Who wouldn't be?" answered Marcy. "If all the paroled prisoners think that way the Confederate army must be in bad shape."

"But they don't," said Mark hastily. "If some of those Tom and I talked with yesterday were here now, they would make Hawkins sing a different song, I bet you. We found them as strong for the cause, and as spiteful against all Unionists, North and South, as they were when they first went into the army. Hawkins is mad because he got whipped; but he will be all right a week from now. Were you in any battles, Marcy?"

"You can't think how astonished we were when we woke up in the morning and learned that the Yankee sailors had been through our neighborhood, and that nobody, except a few niggers, was the wiser for it," said Tom. "Beardsley says you acted as pilot, but he didn't. He positively refused to do it, and the Yankees put him in irons. Is that so?"

"It is true that Beardsley was put in irons, but not because he refused to act as pilot," replied Marcy. "He didn't get a chance to say whether he would go on the bridge or not, for Captain Benton did not ask him. He was ironed for the reason that he served the crew of the *Hollins* that way when he captured them."

"Did they treat you well?"

"First-rate. They couldn't have done better if I had been one of them."

"And you were one of them. You couldn't have done more to help them win the fight if you had had a blue shirt on," were the words that trembled on the point of Tom Allison's tongue. But he did not speak them aloud. He had received one severe rebuke that morning, and did not think he could stand another; but Ben Hawkins and his friends, who just then left the post-office and came across the road to the place where the boys were standing, did not hesitate to commend Marcy for the course he pursued while on the gunboat. They came up in time to hear Mark Goodwin say:

"Why didn't you run that ship aground? That's what I would have done if I had been in your place, and it is what Captain Beardsley would have done if he had been allowed the opportunity."

"And been hung up by the neck for his trouble," said Hawkins; and to Mark's surprise and Tom's, he took Marcy's hand in both his own and shook it cordially. It would have pleased them better if Hawkins had knocked Marcy down. That was the way they expected to see Confederate soldiers treat all Union men and boys, and they would have enjoyed the spectacle. "You stay-at-homers don't know nothing about war," continued Hawkins, giving way to his comrades, all of whom shook Marcy's hand one after the other, "and we uns, who have been there, say Marcy acted just right in doing as he did. I'd 'a' done the same thing myself, and so would any other man unless he was plum crazy. Go and get some soldier clothes and shoulder muskets, you two. We've done our share, and now we will stand back and give you uns a chance to see how you like it."

"Don't you intend to return to the army, Mr. Hawkins?" inquired Marcy.

"Well, 'cording to the oath I've took I can't," answered the soldier. "I did promise that I would never fight against the old flag agin, but that's neither here nor there. My year is pretty nigh up, and I'm going to stay around home and eat good grub for a while. I don't mean to say that I won't never 'list again, but it won't be till I've seen some others whopped like I have been."

He looked fixedly at Tom as he said this, and the boy, believing that he would feel more at his ease if he were farther out of the soldier's reach, turned about and went toward the post-office, followed by his friend Mark.

"Say!" whispered Hawkins, as soon as the two were out of hearing. "I aint a-going to ask you where you stand, kase that aint none of my business; but what's this I hear about your maw having a pile of money in the house, and Beardsley and among 'em be so anxious to get it that they brought men up from Newbern to rob her of it?"

Marcy explained in few words; that is to say, he told what Captain Beardsley thought, but he did not acknowledge that there was money in or about the house with the exception of the small sum he had offered the robbers, and which they refused to take. And then he asked Hawkins how he happened to know anything about it.

"I know pretty much everything that's happened here sense I went into the army, and what's more, I know *why* it happened," was the answer. "My folks told me about it soon's I got home. I know, too, that some of your friends have gone into the Yankee service; but you've got a few yet, and you see them right here with gray jackets on. Say nothing to nobody; but there's skursely a poor man around here who aint beholden to your folks for something or other, and if you get into trouble we're bound to help you out."

"I am very grateful to you for the assurance," said Marcy. "But do you know that if you do not go back to serve your year out, you will be treated as deserters?"

"We know all that, and we know better'n you do how they treat deserters in our army; but it's a good plan to catch your rabbit afore you cook him," said Hawkins, with a grin. "My folks wanted me to stay home the worst kind and see who was going to whop afore I took sides, and I'm mighty sorry I didn't listen to 'em. Look out what you're doing, you babolitionist," exclaimed Hawkins, as old Morris elbowed his way through the group to Marcy's side. "We rebels will eat you up."

"I don't care what you do to Morris so long's you let Marse Mahcy be," said the black man, who was almost ready to cry when he saw the boy standing before him as sound as he was when he left home. "The Yankees done kill him—jes' look at that hand of hisn—and now you rebels done pester him plum to death."

"Go 'long now, Uncle Morris. We aint worrying on him and he will tell you so," replied Hawkins good-naturedly. "But our critter-fellers are round picking up all the darkies they can find and making soldiers of 'em, and you had best watch out. Don't go outside the two-mile limit, or, better yet, don't put your nose out of doors after dark."

Hawkins and his comrades walked away, and old Morris turned a very badly frightened face toward Marcy.

"Don't mind them," said the latter. "They're soldiers, and of course they must have their fun. You need not think that the rebels will ever put faith enough in you black ones to trust you with muskets in your hands."

"They'd better not," said Morris. "How you come here, Marse Mahcy? I been waiting two days for you."

The boy explained that Julius had found him in the creek and helped him home, and the old fellow did not appear to be well pleased with the news, for he walked off, muttering to himself and shaking his head with every step he took, to bring up his mule and Marcy's horse. The latter did not wait for him, but mounted and rode homeward; and he was in so anxious and unsettled a frame of mind that he could not bring himself to take his papers from his pocket. The situation was something he had never dreamed of, and Marcy did not believe it would last for any length of time. The Confederate authorities would not permit enlisted men to roam at large through the country, talking as Hawkins had done, but would soon put a stop to it by some violent measures, and bring their disaffected soldiers to punishment at the same time. The paroled prisoner was angry over the result of the battles at Roanoke Island; he must have been or he would not have expressed himself so freely. And when Marcy reached home and talked the matter over with his mother, and became quieted down so that he could read his papers understandingly, he found that there were some high in authority who were angry over it also ; General Wise for one, who said in his report that "Roanoke Island, being the key to all the rear defences of Norfolk, ought to have been defended at the cost of twenty thousand men." But General Wise did not stop there. He sent a protest to the Confederate Congress, censuring both the President and Secretary of War, and the upshot of the matter was that Mr. Benjamin became so unpopular that he was forced to resign. The general's letter also opened the eyes of the Confederate government to the fact that the people of North Carolina were not half as loyal to the cause as they ought to have been, and that something would have to be done about it. If the Southern men would not enter the army willingly, they must be compelled to come in ; and this the government straightway proceeded to do. Almost the first move that was made brought about the thing that Marcy Gray most dreaded, and made a refugee of him.

CHAPTER XIV.

A YANKEE SCOUTING PARTY.

MARCY GRAY served as pilot on Captain Benton's vessel for a period of ten days, counting from February 8 to the time the fleet set sail for Newbern; but the work the Burnside expedition had to do was not finished until April 26, when Fort Macon, in Georgia, surrendered, after a short, but brisk, bombardment. This fort was commanded by a nephew of the Confederate President, who, in response to a summons to surrender, declared that he would not yield until he had eaten his last biscuit. The Union commander thought that a man who could talk like that would surely do some good fighting, but he was disappointed. A few hours' pounding by gunboats and shore batteries brought the boastful rebel to his senses, and he was glad to escape further punishment by hauling down his own flag, and sending a white one up in place of it.

The Union forces were successful everywhere along the coast; not once did they meet with disaster. The nearest they came to it was when that terrible northeast gale struck them off Hatteras, and with that gale they had their longest and hardest battle. Of course, Marcy Gray did not get what he called "straight news" regarding these glorious victories, but his rebel neighbors confessed to defeat in every engagement, and that was all he wanted to know. But there was another thing that began troubling him now, and it was something he had not thought of. With the fall of Newbern, and the occupation of the principal towns by the Federal troops, the regular mails from the South were cut off, and, for a time, the village of Nashville had little communication with the outside world. Even rebel news, distorted, as it was, out of all semblance to the truth, was better than no news at all, and Marcy declared that there was but one thing left for him to do, and that was to ride around and gossip with the neighbors, as Tom Allison and Mark Goodwin did. His short experience aboard the gunboat filled him with martial ardor, and, if his mother had only been safely out of harm's way, he would have tried every plan he could think of to find Jack, and then he would have shipped on his vessel. Being shot at six hours out of twenty-four he thought was better than living as he was obliged to live now. If he were an enlisted man he would know pretty nearly what he had to face; now he had no idea of it, and that was another thing that troubled him. The news of the victories that were gained so rapidly, one after another, did much to keep up his spirits, but had the opposite effect upon Allison and Goodwin, who could not find words with which to express their disgust. These two, as we have said, spent all their waking hours riding about the settlement comparing notes, and going first to one man, and then to another, in the hope of hearing something encouraging; but they passed the most of their time with Beardsley, who seemed to be the best-informed man for miles around. Of course they did not place a great deal of faith in what the captain told them; but he was always ready to talk, and that was more than other people seemed willing to do. Since Ben Hawkins denounced him in the post-office, Beardsley did not ride around as much as he used to do. He thought he had better stay at home until the effect produced by the rebel soldier's speech had had time to wear away.

On the morning of the 11th of March Tom Allison stood on the front porch of his father's house, thrashing his boots with his riding-whip, and waiting for his horse, which he had ordered brought to the door, when he saw Mark Goodwin coming up the road at a furious gallop. The two generally met at the cross-roads, a mile away, and Tom knew in a moment that something unusual had happened to bring Mark to the house; consequently, he was not much surprised when he saw that the visitor's face was as white as a sheet.

"What's broke loose now?" exclaimed Tom, when his friend dashed into the yard and drew up in front of the porch. "You look as though you were frightened half to death."

"Frightened! I am so elated that I can't stay on my horse a moment longer," replied

Mark; and suiting the action to the word he rolled out of his saddle, pulled the reins over his horse's head, so that he could hold fast to them, and sat down on the lowest step. "Why don't you whoop and holler and dance and—we've licked them off the face of the earth. Have they been here yet?"

"They? Who?" cried Tom. "What do you mean, any way?"

"I mean that you had better hide your hunting outfit and be quick about it," answered Mark. "They took mine away from me just now, and I came here on purpose to warn you. You see it was this way," added Mark, as Tom came down the steps and seated himself by his friend's side. "The stories that have been spread abroad about her being no good, and so heavy that her engines could not move her from the dock where she was built, were all lies that were got up on purpose to fool the Yanks; but three days ago, that was on the 8th——"

"Look here, Mark, you've got two stories mixed up," exclaimed Tom.

"Two? I've got half a dozen, and I don't know which to tell first. And the beauty of it is, they are all good ones."

"You said somebody had taken your hunting rig away from you," Tom reminded him. "Do you call that a good story?"

"I didn't think about that when I spoke," replied Mark, jumping up and looking around for a place to hitch his horse. Then he calmed himself by an effort, and went on to say: "This morning I received all the proof I want that we are for a time a subjugated people—that the presence of a hostile garrison means something. I had somehow got it into my head that the Yankees would stay inside the forts they have taken from us by their overwhelming numbers, and that they would not have the cheek to come among our people where they know well enough they are not wanted, but now I know that they don't mean to do anything of the sort. They are going to bother us by sending scouting parties through our settlement as often as they feel like it."

The spiteful emphasis Mark threw into his words, and the look of disgust his face wore while he talked, brought a hearty laugh from somewhere. The boys looked up and saw Mr. Allison standing at the top of the steps.

"Of course, Mark, they will do that very thing," said he. "They will make it their business to annoy us in every way they can. Do I understand you to say that they came to your house this morning?"

"Yes, sir, they did," said Mark angrily. "There were about fifty of them in the party. They asked for father, and when he sent back word, as any other Southern gentleman would have done, that he would hold no intercourse with the invaders of his State——"

"Was your father crazy enough to send them any such message as that?" exclaimed Mr. Allison, who was very much astonished.

"Of course he sent them that message," replied Mark, becoming surprised in his turn. "Wouldn't you, if you had been in his place?"

"Indeed, I would not," said Mr. Allison, decidedly.

"My father is a brave man," added Mark, in a tone which implied that that was more than he could say of the gentleman to whom he was speaking. "He looks down on a Yankee."

"So do I; but that is no reason why I should make a fool of myself when they come to my house fifty strong and send word that they want to see me. It's a wonder they didn't hang your father, or take him away with them."

"We thought that was just what they meant to do," said Mark, with a shudder, "for four or five of them came rushing into the house, and I tell you they talked and acted savage."

"Well, what did they want?" asked Tom.

"They wanted to know if we had any weapons in the house," answered Mark. "And when we told them no, they——"

"That was another foolish thing for you to do," Mr. Allison interposed. "Your people must have taken leave of their senses since I last saw them. When you said there were no weapons in the house, they proceeded to search for them."

"That is just what they did," replied Mark. with tears of rage in his eyes. "And we had to stand there and see them pull the house to pieces——"

"And steal everything they could lay their hands on," chimed in Tom.

"Of course. That's a foregone conclusion; although I did hear my mother say that she passed her bedroom door while the search was going on, and there was her jewelry lying on the bureau, and a soldier with a carbine keeping guard over it."

"That was done for effect," declared Tom. "When she comes to look into the matter, she will find that she hasn't so much as a breastpin left. Did they take your father's pocket-book?"

"I haven't the least doubt of it, although I did not see them do it," said Mark, who wished he could add effect to his story by saying that he had seen his father robbed of his money. "They were the very worst-looking lot I ever saw—all Irish and Dutch; not a gentleman among them."

"But what did they steal besides your weapons?" inquired Mr. Allison.

"I didn't see that they took a thing,"

Mark was obliged to confess, "but, of course, I did not look into their pockets. When father heard them coming, he shoved his revolver between the mattresses on his bed; but he might as well have left it in plain sight, for the first thing those Yankees did when they went into his room was to pull that bed to pieces. Then they went upstairs into my room and walked off with my fine rifle and shot-gun. One of them grinned when he went out, and said that for a place that had no weapons in it, he thought our house had panned out pretty well. I tell you that made me mad."

"And do you think they are coming this way?" asked Mr. Allison.

"I believe they will visit every house in the settlement before they quit," replied Mark; whereupon Tom got up and acted as though he wanted to do something. "They must have robbed other houses before they came to ours, for I noticed that several of them carried sporting rifles and fowling-pieces in addition to the carbines that were slung at their backs. It is my opinion that you had better wake up, if you want to save the guns that cost you so much money."

Mr. Allison evidently thought so, too, for he turned about and went into the house, whither he was followed by Tom and Mark as soon as the latter had hitched his horse. The boys went at once to Tom's room and opened the closet, in which was stowed away one of the finest and most expensive hunting outfits in that part of the State.

"Sooner than let this fall into the hands of the enemy I would break it in pieces over the chopping-block," said Tom, looking admiringly at the handsome muzzle-loading rifle he had carried on more than one excursion through the Dismal Swamp.

"Oh, I wouldn't do that," replied Mark. "Take it into the garden, and shove it under some of the bushes. Go ahead and I will follow with the shot-gun; but be sure and take the flask, horn, game-bags, and everything else belonging to them, for if they find part of the rig they will want to know where the rest is."

Mark's suggestions were carried out, and just in the nick of time too; for as the boys were returning from the garden, in which they had hastily concealed the guns and their accoutrements, they heard the pounding of a multitude of hoofs on the road and hastened through the hall to the front porch in time to see a small squad of cavalry ride into the yard, while another and larger body of troopers halted outside the gate. It was plain that Mr. Allison did not intend to follow the example of his foolhardy neighbor, and so run the risk of bringing upon himself the vengeance of the men he could not successfully resist, for he stood out in plain view of them, and even returned the military salute of the big whiskered man who rode at the head of the squad.

"They are the same who robbed our house," said Mark, in an excited whisper. "Will they know me, do you think? And if so, will they do anything to me for warning you?"

Tom Allison did not reply, for his attention was wholly occupied by the Yankee soldiers, the first he had ever seen. They were not ragged and dirty like most of the paroled Confederates who passed through the settlement a few days before. On the contrary, they were well and warmly dressed, and, like the horses they rode, looked as though they had been accustomed to good living.

"Good-morning," said the captain pleasantly. "It is my duty to ask if you have anything in the shape of weapons in your house."

To the surprise of both the boys Mr. Allison replied:

"Yes, sir; I have."

"That's honest, at any rate," said the captain. "Will you please bring them out?"

"Do you intend to take them from me?" said Mr. Allison.

"I think you understand the situation as well as I could explain it to you," answered the soldier, nodding toward Mark Goodwin, whom he recognized as soon as he looked at him; and as if to show that he was not in the humor to put up with any nonsense, he dismounted, his example being quickly followed by his men.

"Of course I will bring them out," Mr. Allison hastened to say. "But they are heirlooms and I don't like to part with them.

Besides, they are no longer of use as weapons."

He went into the house as he said this, and the captain, who seemed to be a lively, talkative fellow, and good-natured as well, even if he was a Yankee, turned to Mark and said:

"You beat me here, did you not?"

"I hope there was nothing wrong in my coming," said Mark, beginning to feel uneasy.

"Nothing whatever. You have a right to go where you please and do what you like, so long as you do not set the graybacks on us."

"Graybacks?" said Mark inquiringly.

"Yes. Johnnies—rebel cavalry."

"Oh! Well, there are none around here that I know of, but you can find plenty of them a few miles back in the country," said Mark, who was a little surprised to hear himself talking so freely with this boy in blue who had carried things with so high a hand in his father's house a short time before; and then, emboldened by the sound of his own voice, and prompted by an idea that just then came into his mind, he added: "I can tell you where you will find one rebel and also a rebel flag, if you would like to have it for a trophy."

These words almost knocked Tom Allison over, but at the same time they loosened his tongue.

"That's so, but I never should have thought to speak of it," he exclaimed. "Go back the way you came until you strike the big road, then turn to the left and stop at the first house you come to."

"And remember that you will pass ruins on your left hand before you get where you want to go," added Mark, who did not mean that the Yankee officer should miss his way for want of explicit directions.

"Who lives there?" inquired the latter, looking sharply at the two boys as if he meant to read their thoughts, and find out what object they had in view in volunteering so much information. "He must be a rebel, of course, if he has a rebel flag in his possession."

"His name is Marcy Gray, and he is rebel or Union, just as it happens," said Tom. "He has been pilot on a privateer and blockade runner."

"Aha!" said the captain.

"Yes," continued Tom. "But the minute you Yankees came here and captured the Island he quit business and came home."

"Which was the most sensible thing he could have done," said the officer. "Are there any weapons in the house, do you know?"

Before either of the boys could reply Mr. Allison came out upon the porch, bringing with him the "heirlooms" of which he had spoken—an old officer's sword and a flint-lock musket that, so he said, had passed the winter with Washington at Valley Forge.

"If that is the case I'll not touch them," said the captain. "These are all you have, I suppose?"

"There are no other weapons in the house," replied Mr. Allison.

The officer smiled, gave Mark Goodwin a comical look, and then mounted his horse and rode out of the yard without saying another word. Mr. Allison and the boys watched him until he joined his command and with it disappeared down the road, and then Mark said:

"What do you reckon he meant by grinning at me in that fashion?"

"He meant that those 'heirlooms' of father's did not fool him worth a cent," answered Tom. "The next officer who comes here will say: 'Perhaps there are no weapons in the house, but are there any *around* it?' And then he will turn his men loose in the yard and root up everything. Those guns of mine must go in some safer place as soon as night comes. Now give us one of your good stories, Mark."

"That's so," exclaimed the latter. "The sight of those Yankees made me forget all about it. You know that big iron-clad of ours that's been building up at Portsmouth, don't you?"

"Aw! I don't want to hear any more about her," cried Tom. "She is a rank failure."

"Judging by the stories that have been circulated about her she was a failure; but judged by the work she did three days ago she is a glorious success," replied Mark, pausing for a moment to enjoy the surprise which his statement occasioned among his auditors; for now that the Yankees had taken themselves off, without turning the house upside down or insulting anybody, the whole family came out on the porch, and a servant brought chairs enough to seat them all. "She captured and burned the *Congress*, sunk the *Cumberland*, and if there had been a few hours more of daylight, she would have served the rest of the Yankee fleet in the same way."

"Why, Mark, when did this happen?" inquired Mrs. Allison.

"And where?" chimed in Tom.

"And how did you hear of it, seeing that the Yankees have rendered our post-office at Nashville useless to us?" said his father.

"It happened on the afternoon of the 8th of March, and the scene of the conflict was Hampton Roads, off the mouth of the James," answered Mark. "My father told me of it last night, and he first got the news from Captain Beardsley, who——"

"Ah! I was afraid there wasn't a word of truth in it," exclaimed Mr. Allison.

"But it is true, every word of it," said Mark earnestly. "Beardsley always has been half crazy over that vessel, for he says he has seen and talked with sailor-men who have been all over her; and he has more than once declared that, when she was ready for sea, she would make a scattering among the Yankee fleet at Fortress Monroe. He told father that he had heard a letter read that was in some way smuggled through from Norfolk yesterday, and that that letter was written by a man who took part in the fight. All the same father would not believe it until he had seen and read the letter himself. He thinks it is true, and so do I."

"I certainly hope it is," said Mrs. Allison. "But those Yankees who came here a while ago acted more like victors than like beaten men."

Mark Goodwin, who of course got his ideas from his father, declared that they would not act that way much longer; for as soon as the Federal fleet at Fortress Monroe had been disposed of, Commodore Buchanan, the gallant commander of the *Virginia*, would have his choice of two courses of action: he could not carry coal enough to run up and lay the city of New York under contribution, but he could reduce Fortress Monroe and bombard Washington, or he could come South, scatter Goldsborough's fleet, and recapture Pamlico and Albemarle sounds.

"Glory!" shouted Tom, jumping up and throwing his hat into the air; and even his father began to show signs of excitement. "Tell him not to mind us, but to go up and lay Washington in ashes. Our papers said long ago that it must be purified by fire before Southern legislators would consent to go there again. Well, which course did Buchanan decide to follow?"

"I don't know," replied Mark. "I wish I did; but that letter was written on the evening of the 8th, after the *Virginia* drew out of the fight and came back to Norfolk."

"Were any of our brave fellows injured?" asked Mrs. Allison.

"Oh, yes. Buchanan himself was wounded, and treacherously too. When the *Congress* struck her flag and our boats went alongside to take possession of her, she opened fire on us again. That made Buchanan mad, and he riddled her with his big guns till he killed her captain and more than a hundred of her crew."

"She was deservedly punished," said Mrs. Allison, and all on the porch agreed with her, though there was not a word of truth in the story. The volley of musketry that was poured into the Confederate small boats came from the Union troops on shore, who did not know that the *Congress* had surrendered.

"Go on and tell us some more good news," said Tom, when his friend settled back in his chair.

"That's about all I heard, because the letter did not go much into particulars; but there'll be others smuggled through in a day or two, and some papers, most likely, and then I shall expect to hear that our fellows are in Washington. At any rate the people around here are acting on the supposition that we have got the upper hand of the Yanks, and I want to be able to say that I had a hand in whipping them, so I have joined the Home Guards. So has my father."

"The Home Guards?" echoed Tom.

"I was not aware that there was an organization of that kind in the settlement," said Mr. Allison.

"I didn't either until father told me last night," answered Mark. "And I am a little too fast in saying that I have joined. I am going to hand in my name this very day, and Tom, you must go with me."

"I'll do it," said Tom, getting upon his feet and squaring off at an imaginary antagonist. "What are we going to do? Who are we going to whip, and what is the object of the thing, any way?"

"Well, I—we're going to fight," replied Mark.

"I suppose one object of the organization is to keep the spirit of patriotism alive among our people," observed Mr. Allison.

"That's the idea; and to make the traitors among us shut their mouths and quit carrying their heads so high," cried Mark. "They have had companies of this kind in Kentucky and Tennessee for a long time; and in Missouri the State Guards, as they are called, have done the most of the fighting. Ben Hawkins says that if we had had strong companies of well-disciplined Home Guards around here, Roanoke Island would not have been captured."

"Who cares what Ben Hawkins says?" exclaimed Tom. "He's a traitor; and when he declared that he wouldn't fight for the South any more, I told him to his face that he was a coward."

"Oh, my son," said the doting mother, "I am afraid your high spirit will bring you into trouble some time."

Mark Goodwin knew that his friend's "high spirit" had nothing to do with the scathing rebukes he had received in the post-office. His unruly tongue and his want of common sense were to blame for it.

"Is Mr. Goodwin a member of the Home Guards?" inquired Mr. Allison. "Then I think I will ride over and have a talk with him. From his house I will go to town and see if I can learn more of that glorious victory in Hampton Roads."

The gentleman went into the house accompanied by his wife, and Tom and Mark descended the steps out of ear-shot of the rest of the family. "Where shall we go?" was the first question they asked each other.

"I wish we could go to half a dozen different places at once," said Tom, at length. "If we go to Beardsley's we may be sorry we didn't go to town; and if we call on Colonel Shelby, to see if he can tell us anything about that fight, we may be sorry we didn't go somewhere else. What do you say?"

"I say, let's ride over to Beardsley's in the first place, and to Marcy Gray's in the next."

"And so follow up that squad of thieving Yankees and see what damage they did? If they overhauled Gray's house I can pretend to sympathize with them, you know, for that was the way they served us."

"Overhaul nothing!" exclaimed Tom in disgust. "Mark my words: I don't believe they went near the Grays; but if they did, they treated them with more civility than they showed my father. Come along, and see if I haven't told you the truth."

Tom's horse was ready and waiting, and a rapid ride of twenty minutes brought him and Mark to a field in which Beardsley was working with some of his negroes. When he saw them approaching he shied a chip he held in his hand at the head of the nearest darky, who caught sight of it in time to dodge, and came up to the fence to wait for them. His actions proved that he was full of good news, for he placed his hands on his knees, bent himself half double, looked down at the ground, and shook his head as if he were laughing heartily. When he reached the fence he pounded the top rail with his fist, and shouted as soon as the boys came within speaking distance:

"Have them varmints been up to your house?"

"Do you mean the Yanks?" answered Mark, as he and Tom reined their horses across the ditch to the place where the man was standing. "I should say so; and you ought to have seen the way they conducted themselves, just because my father stood on his dignity as any other Southern gentleman would."

"Well, he was a fule for standing on his dignity or anything else," said the captain bluntly. "You didn't ketch your Uncle Lon trying to ride no such high horse as that there, I bet you, kase fifty agin one is too many. I was right here in this field when they come along," continued Beardsley, resting his right foot upon one of the lower rails and both his elbows on the top one, for he never could stand alone if there were anything he could conveniently lean upon, "and when they asked me did I have any we'pons of any sort up to the house, I told 'em I had for a fact, and if they didn't mind, I'd go up and bring 'em out. So I clim the fence and went along."

Here the captain went off into another paroxysm of laughter, shaking his head and pounding the top rail with his clenched hand.

"Well, what did you give them when you reached the house?" asked Mark impatiently.

"Nothing in the wide world but an old shotgun that belonged to one of the boys that used to come out from Nashville squirrel shooting once in a while, and that I wouldn't fire off if you'd give me a five-dollar gold piece," chuckled Beardsley. "The rest of my shooting-irons is hid where they won't find 'em. You see I suspicioned that they would do something of this kind as soon's they got a foothold here, and so I toted my guns out in the garden and shoved 'em under some bresh there is there."

"You had better hunt up a better hiding-place for them the first thing you do," said Tom earnestly. "There's where I put mine when Mark warned me, but I am not going to leave them there. The Yankee who came to our house was as much of a gentleman as one of his kind could be, but the next one who comes along may be a different sort. Did they go to Marcy Gray's?"

"Bet your life," said the captain, with another chuckle. "Do you reckon I'd let them miss that place? I sent them there, and they was gone long enough to give the house a good overhauling; but what I can't quite see through——"

"We sent them there too," exclaimed Tom. "Did you see them when they returned? What did they have?"

"I'll bet they made Marcy hand over that fine hunting rig in which he takes so much pride," added Mark. "I'd give a dollar if I could have looked into his face about the time he gave up that boss shot-gun of his, that I have heard him brag about until it made me sick."

"Why didn't they take Marcy himself as well as the guns?" continued Tom. "He couldn't deny that he has given aid and comfort to the Confederates by running the blockade and capturing vessels for them."

"And if he did deny it, how did he explain the presence of that Confederate flag in his house?" demanded Mark.

"Hold on till I tell you how it was," said Beardsley, as soon as the boys gave him a chance to speak. "Them Yankees went up to Grays', like I told you, and I was here when they come back; but they didn't have the first thing."

"Whoop! Then they didn't search the house," yelled Mark. "Marcy and Jack have more shot-guns and sporting rifles than any two other boys in the country."

"Leastwise they didn't find nothing that was contraband of war," said the captain. "Them is the very words they spoke to me."

Tom and Mark looked at each other in speechless amazement.

CHAPTER XV.

MARCY SEES SOMEBODY.

IF you would like to know why Captain Burrows (that was the name of the officer who commanded the Union troopers) did not find in Mrs. Gray's house any articles that were contraband of war, we will ride with him and his company long enough to find out.

During the days of which we write scouting was a necessary duty, but it sometimes happened that it was one of the most disagreeable, particularly when it fell to the lot of a gentleman like Captain Burrows, and his orders compelled him to enter private houses whose only inmates were supposed to be women and children ; but now and then these scouts found able-bodied men in uniform concealed in dwellings that were thought to be occupied wholly by non-combatants. During the Yazoo Pass expedition the gunboat to which we belonged was ordered to search all the houses along the banks of the Coldwater and Tallahatchie rivers, although we knew that that important duty had already been performed by the soldiers. In one house, whose female occupants vociferously affirmed that all the men who belonged there were in Vicksburg and had not been near home for six months, a belt containing a sword and revolver was found under a bed. That was as good evidence as we wanted that the man who owned the belt was not far away, and after a short search he was discovered in the cellar. No doubt there were better hiding-places about the house, but the blue-jackets came up so suddenly that he did not have time to go to them. A little further search resulted in the finding of some important dispatches which the Confederate had concealed in a barrel of corned beef; but when its contents were poked over by a bayonet, the dispatches betrayed themselves by rising to the surface. So you see it was sometimes necessary to search private houses; but like Mr. Watkins, the gunboat officer who took Marcy Gray from his bed to serve as pilot in the

Union navy, Captain Burrows wished that some other officer had been detailed to do the work. Although he went from Beardsley's house straight to Mrs. Gray's, he had no intention of searching it. He knew more of Marcy than Tom and Mark thought, and perhaps he could have told them a few things concerning themselves that would have made them open their eyes. He had halted and questioned every negro he met on his scout, and he knew the name of every Union man and every rebel in the settlement. When he arrived at the house he did not lead his men into the yard, nor did he ride in himself. He dismounted and went in on foot, and Marcy, who had seen him coming, opened the door without giving him time to knock.

"I know you are Marcy Gray, from the descriptions I have heard of you," was the way in which the captain began his business. "I am told that you have any number of dangerous weapons as well as a Confederate flag in your possession."

"I plead guilty," replied Marcy. "Will you walk in?"

He was not at all afraid of the officer, for the latter smiled at him in a way that put him quite at his ease. Besides, if the captain knew anything about him, as his words seemed to indicate, he must be aware that he had willingly served under the Union flag, and under the other one because he could not help himself. Marcy led him into the room in which his mother was waiting, and the captain straightway quieted her fears, if she had any, by saying:

"I am on a scout, madam, looking for rebel soldiers and fire-arms that may be concealed in the settlement; but, so far as you are concerned, my visit is merely a matter of form."

"Take this chair," said Marcy, "and I will be back in a moment."

The Confederate flag had been removed from its place on the wall, but the boy knew where to find it; and when he brought it into the room he brought with it his fine rifle and shotgun, his revolvers, a bed-quilt and the letter that Captain Benton had given him; and Julius, who followed at his heels, brought as many more guns, which belonged to the absent

Jack. He was gone but a few minutes, but quite long enough to enable Mrs. Gray to give the visitor some scraps of his history; and as her story was confirmed by those he had heard from the negroes along his line of march, he was so well satisfied of Marcy's loyalty that when the latter came in and deposited his burdens on the table, the officer had not the least intention of taking any of them away with him. He spread the Confederate flag upon the floor so that he could see it; examined the guns one after another, and inquired about the shooting on the plantation; and held Captain Benton's letter up to the light, to see if he could read what was written upon it.

"There's a fire on the hearth, sir," Marcy reminded him.

"I know there is; but if I should bring out the words by holding this paper to the heat, and it should some day fall into the hands of the rebels, it might make serious trouble for you," said the captain. "If such a thing happens I don't want to be the means of it, for I know that you were of service to our fleet during the fight at Roanoke Island."

"I was there, sir," answered the boy modestly. "And if you say so, I will rip up this quilt and show you the Union flag that waved over my head while I was acting as Captain Benton's pilot."

"A Union flag in this house, alongside of a Confederate!" exclaimed the captain, who was surprised to hear it. "I should think you would be afraid to have it about you. I understand that the most of the people in this neighborhood are the worst of rebels."

Marcy replied that although there were some Union people in the settlement the Confederates outnumbered them two to one, but he did not believe that any of the latter knew there was a Union banner in the house. Then he went on to explain how and when it came into his possession, and again offered to produce it; but Captain Burrows said he would not put him to so much trouble. He asked a few leading questions which he knew Marcy could not answer unless he had really "been there," after which he took his cap from the table, saying as he did so:

"If you will take a friend's advice, you will conceal those guns, as well as any other articles of value you may have, somewhere outside, and keep Captain Benton's letter where you can put your hand on it at any hour of the day or night. It is probable that some of our scouts will be along here every few days, and I am afraid there will be some among them who will insist on going through your house. Besides, the Home Guards may need those guns to arm some of their men."

"Home Guards?" echoed Marcy. "What are they?"

"Well, they are men who, although they haven't the courage to enlist in the army to fight us, are perfectly willing to act as police in the rear of the Confederate army. It is their intention to patrol the settlement, night and day, until they drive out every man who is suspected of Union sentiments."

Marcy looked bewildered, and his mother was frightened.

"Is it possible that you haven't heard of it?" continued the captain. "Then it proves the truth of the old saying that one needs to go away from home to learn the news. We know all about it, and we also know that these Home Guards intend to operate as they do in Kentucky, Tennessee, and Missouri; that is, they will be industrious and peaceful farmers during the daytime, and thieves and murderers at night. But mind you, as fast as we can locate them, we shall run them in and hold them as prisoners of war. I hope that you, and the rest of the Union people about here, will be watchful and keep us posted."

"This is news to me," said Marcy, as soon as his surprise would allow him to speak. "I never dreamed of such a thing."

"Then I am very glad I mentioned it," said the officer.

"And I am certain I can give you the name of every man in the company," added Marcy. "What do you suppose put the idea into their heads?"

"I am sure I do not know, unless it was that fight in Hampton Roads, which created the wildest excitement all over the country. The Richmond people were very jubilant, while our Washington folks were correspondingly depressed."

"That is another piece of news," said Mrs. Gray. "To what particular battle do you refer, Captain?"

"Don't you know anything about that, either?" exclaimed the officer, throwing open his coat, and thrusting his hand into an inside pocket. "It was a fight between our fleet and six Confederate steamers—five wooden vessels and one iron-clad. It lasted the better part of two days. At the end of the first day the advantage was all with the Confederates, who captured and burned one of our best ships and sunk another, without any serious damage to themselves. These papers, which I shall be glad to leave with you, tell all about it, and they will also give you a faint idea of the consternation that seized upon everybody up North, when the story got abroad that the rebels had one single vessel that could cope with Uncle Sam's entire navy. Every city along the coast, as well as the capital, was supposed to be at the mercy of that one iron-clad; *but* when she came out, on the morning of the 9th, to complete her work of destruction, she ran against a snag, in the shape of a little

Union iron-clad, not more than half her size, which had come upon the scene during the night."

"And did those two iron-clads fight?" exclaimed Marcy, who was worked up to the highest pitch of excitement. "Which whipped?"

"Of course they fought, for that was what our vessel, the *Monitor*, went down there for. She came in the night and anchored behind the hull of one of our big ships, so that the rebel boat did not see her until she was close upon her. They had the hardest kind of a fight, and our vessel whipped."

Marcy did not break out into cheers as the captain no doubt thought he would, but settled contentedly back in his chair and drew a long breath of relief.

"Our fellows did not sink the *Virginia* as they tried to do," continued Captain Burrows, "but they gave her such a pounding that it was all she could do to draw out of the fight and go back to Norfolk. We had the best of the engagement, for the rebel boat failed to accomplish the object she had in view when she came out, which was to sink the three frigates that were aground off Fortress Monroe."

"And you think it was during the excitement consequent upon the first day's victory that our neighbors were led to organize the Home Guards?" said Mrs. Gray.

"I certainly think it had much to do with it," answered Captain Burrows. "You see these 'stay-at-homers,' as I have heard them called, jumped to the conclusion that the Yankees were whipped, and when the war is over they want to be able to say that they helped do it."

"Pardon my curiosity," said Marcy. "But have you seen Ben Hawkins?"

"I don't think there will be any harm in telling you that I had a short talk with him before I came here. I met him on the road, and he volunteered so much information concerning his neighbors that I became suspicious of him. But I have since learned that he told me nothing but the truth. He is a paroled prisoner and, I may add, a warm friend to you and your mother."

"And you do not think it would be unwise to trust him?" said Mrs. Gray, who had listened with surprise to her son's account of the speech he had heard Hawkins deliver in the post-office.

"No, I do not. He is very bitter against the Confederacy, as many of his comrades are; he has had enough of soldiering, and if I were in your place I think I should look upon him as a friend."

"I thank you for saying so much," replied Marcy. "I am sure we need friends bad enough."

"And don't forget," said the captain as he rose to go, "that we are not here for fun. I shall report you to my commander as a staunch Union family, and if your rebel neighbors prove troublesome and you will let us know, we will surely punish them for it. I wish you good-day."

"Now there's a friend worth having," said Marcy, when he and his mother were once more alone. "He brought us bad news, though. He did not want to say too much against his comrades, but he said enough, and I think we had better hide your silver and jewelry before some rascal in blue walks off with them."

"No doubt it would be a wise thing to do," replied Mrs. Gray. "He said he *heard* that there were arms and a flag in the house; have you any idea who told him?"

"Beardsley is the chap," answered Marcy readily. "Two or three times I was on the point of asking what the captain said to him, but I was afraid he might not answer me. Beardsley can't get me into trouble with the Yankees, and he might as well give up trying. Now let's read about the fight in Hampton Roads."

"What about the Home Guards?" said his mother.

"I will take a ride presently and see if I can learn something about them. They must have been very sly in getting up their company, for I don't believe our darkies knew the first thing about it. If they did they would have told us. I wonder if it wouldn't be a good plan for me to join it."

"Why, Marcy, they would not accept you!" exclaimed Mrs. Gray.

"That's what I think; but if they refuse it will show me that I had better be on my guard, won't it?"

"I am glad to know that Hawkins is our friend."

"When I met him in Nashville, and he took the trouble to cross the road and shake hands with me and say that I did just right while I was on Captain Benton's gunboat, I knew right where he stood," answered Marcy. "I can see him as often as I have anything to say to him, for he is loafing about the settlement all the time."

While Marcy talked he was looking through one of the papers Captain Burrows had left behind for the account of that famous fight in Hampton Roads, and when he found it he read it aloud. The result of the first day's struggle must have been alarming as well as discouraging to the loyal people in the North, and the gloomy predictions that were made in the papers concerning the terrible things the *Virginia* was going to do when she finished the Union fleet at Fortress Monroe, were enough to make Marcy feel gloomy himself. But the account of the next fight was most inspiriting. The little *Monitor* proved to be more than a match for her ponderous antagonist. Washington would not be bombarded, the blockading fleet, which the *Virginia* was to sink or capture at her leisure, was still on top of the water and likely to stay there, and the recognition of the Southern Confederacy by France and England was as far off as ever.

"There's one thing I like about Northern papers," said Marcy, when he had read every line he could find that in any way related to the matter that was just then uppermost in his mind. "They always tell the truth. If their people are whipped they don't hesitate to say so, but ours gloss it over and try to make it appear that every fight is a Confederate victory. According to our Newbern papers the South hasn't lost a single place that she couldn't spare as well as not. Donelson and Fort Henry were outposts that we did not intend to hold anyway, and Roanoke Island was of so little consequence that the Richmond authorities did not garrison it as heavily as they would if they had wanted to keep it. It's the worst kind of bosh, and everybody in the South knows it. Now then," he added, addressing himself to Julius, who, since he followed his master into the room, had stood in one corner hearing and seeing all that was said and done, "put these guns and things where they belong, and stand by to-night after dark to help me hide them in the garden. You heard what that Federal officer said about the Home Guards, didn't you? Well, what do you know of them?"

"Not de fustest think, Marse Mahcy," answered the boy earnestly. "Dey gettin' to be mighty jubus of de niggahs round hyar, an' nobody nebber say nuffin whar Julius kin ketch it."

"Keep your eyes and ears open, and if you do catch on to anything come straight to me with it; do you understand? Now I am going to ride out for a while."

"Do you intend to say anything about our visitors?" inquired his mother.

"If I meet any one who knows they were here I don't see how I can avoid speaking of them," was Marcy's reply. "But circumstances will have to determine what I shall say about them. I don't mean to let every Tom, Dick, and Harry know how very friendly that captain was with us. I don't think it would be just the thing. Good-by."

"Look a hyar, Marse Mahcy," began Julius ; and then he hesitated for as much as a minute before he went on to say, "You know dat niggah Mose?"

"Yes, I know Mose," answered Marcy, and he might have added that he knew him to be the laziest and most worthless black man on the plantation. "What of him?"

"Well, sar, moster," replied the boy, "when I fotch in dem guns an' luf 'em on de table I slip out de do' kase I aint wantin' to see no horns an' hoofs like Marse Jack say de Yankees done got, an' I see Mose talkin' wid dem soldiers in de road. Den he slip thoo 'em into de bresh on de odder side de road an' never come out no mo' ; an' den I come hyar to tol' you."

"Do you mean to say that Mose has run away?" cried Marcy and his mother in concert.

"Yes, sar, missus; dat's what I mean," replied Julius.

Marcy was much surprised to hear it, but after all it was nothing more nor less than he had predicted when the war first broke out. The negroes knew to a man that the contest between the North and South would decide whether they were to be bondsmen or free, and it was natural that their sympathies should be on the side of those who did not believe in slavery, and that they should desire to be with them.

"You are quite sure that the Yankee soldiers did not take Mose away, are you?" said Marcy, after a little pause.

Yes, Julius was positive about that. When the Federal captain left the house Julius had hastened to the front porch in order to satisfy himself on that very point, and had taken pains to see that Mose was not with the soldiers when they rode away. Mose had gone on his own hook.

"I am afraid he will repent when it is too late," said Mrs. Gray, with a sigh of regret. "Mose is too old, and too badly crippled with rheumatism, to be of any use to his new friends."

"I suppose you and Morris will be going next," said Marcy, nodding at Julius, "and that, if I want my filly brought to the door, I can bring her myself."

"Oh, hursh, honey," replied the boy. "I aint a-keerin what dat old niggah Morris gwine do, but Julius aint gwine run away."

"I think you are better off here than you would be anywhere else. The Yankees believe that those who don't work can't eat, and that would let you out so far as grub is concerned. You never did a hand's turn in your life. Now go and tell Morris to saddle my horse, and then come back, and put away these guns as I told you."

When Julius left the room Marcy put on his hat, and went out to ask if any of the other house servants knew that old Mose had run away, and was not much surprised to find that they all knew of it and had been expecting it, for Mose had given them due notice of what he intended to do. He had often been heard to say that if the Yankee soldiers ever came to the plantation he would go away with them, and he had kept his word. Some planters in the neighborhood would have said, "Good riddance to bad rubbish," for of late years Mose had not done work enough to pay for the corn meal and bacon he ate, let alone the clothes he wore; but Marcy felt sorry for him, and predicted that Mose would repent of his bargain in less than a month.

"Marse Mahcy, will the Yankees luf him come back if he wants to?" inquired Morris.

"I reckon not," was the boy's answer. "The Federal general, Butler, has declared slaves to be contraband of war, and I don't think they will give Mose up any more than they would surrender a mule they had captured. Now, what do you black ones know about the Home Guards?"

The expression of bewilderment that came upon the ebony faces by which he was surrounded prepared Marcy for the reply. The servants, one and all, declared that they did not know what he meant; and this made it plain that the rebels in the settlement were beginning to learn that their black people could not be trusted to keep their secrets. He went into the house to tell his mother what he had learned, and finding his filly at the door when he came back, he mounted and rode away.

The first white man he saw was one who could have told him all about the Home Guards if he had been so disposed. It was Captain Beardsley, who was still in the field with his negroes, Tom Allison and Mark Goodwin having left him a few minutes before Marcy came up. The man did not stop his work and come to the fence, nor did he look up as Marcy rode by ; and this made the latter believe that his old captain had some reason for wishing to avoid him.

" He is going to spring something else on me, and before long, too," was what Marcy said to himself as he passed on down the road. " When Beardsley won't talk he is dangerous."

That he had shot close to the mark was made evident to Marcy before ten minutes more had passed over his head. A short distance farther on was the gate which gave entrance to the carriage-way that ran by the ruins of Beardsley's home. It was wide open, and as he rode up he saw a horseman passing through it. Marcy had a fair view of him, and recognized him at once as the man Hanson, his mother's old overseer ; and he was riding one of Beardsley's horses.

CHAPTER XVI.

A FRIEND IN GRAY.

MARCY GRAY had seldom thought of his mother's overseer since he learned that he had been spirited away by armed and masked men, and, when he did, it was to indulge in the hope that he would never see or hear of him again. He did not believe that Hanson would dare disregard the warning of the Union men, who had "turned him loose, with orders never to show his face in the settlement again;" but here he was, riding along the public road in broad daylight, without making the least effort at concealment, and, to make the situation more alarming, he was riding one of Captain Beardsley's horses. Acting upon the first thought that came into his mind, Marcy urged his filly forward, intending to speak to the man, and Hanson, nothing loath, turned his horse about to wait for him.

"I'm on hands agin, like a bad piece of money," he said, with a laugh.

"So I see," answered Marcy. "And I must say that I little expected to meet you."

Hanson's response, and the way in which he acted, disheartened Marcy Gray, for they gave him a clew to the course this enemy of his mother's had marked out for himself. The first thing he did was to ride up and offer Marcy his hand, and the boy took it, because he did not think it would be policy to refuse. He wanted to find out what the man's plans were, and he could not do that by making him angry the first thing he did. Then Hanson went on to say:

"But I'm back agin, all the same, and safe and sound, too. I hope you didn't think I would let them few Yankees scare me away from my home altogether? I belong on your plantation, and there's right where I am going before I am many hours older."

This was an astounding and terrifying statement, and it was a minute or two before Marcy could collect his wits sufficiently to reply to it.

"We never expected you to come back, and so I took your place," said he at length. "I am my mother's overseer now."

"You!" exclaimed Hanson, with a laugh. "What do you know about farming and driving niggers? 'Taint gentleman's work, that aint, and you aint by no means suited to it. I'll take it off your hands now. 'Cording to my contract, I can't leave till next month, any way, and, besides, I've lost right smart of time. I didn't leave the plantation of my own free will; but that don't make no difference."

"We owe you a little money, and mother will give it to you any day you call for it; but we don't ask you to make up any lost time," said Marcy, who couldn't bear the thought of having this sneaking Hanson on the plantation again.

"I know what my duty is," replied the overseer very decidedly, "and I mean to do it. I bargained with your mother for so much a year. I want every cent of that money, for I can't afford to do without it; but I shan't ask for it till I have done twelve good solid months of work."

Marcy felt like yelling, and it was only by a great effort of will that he controlled himself. He knew pretty nearly what was before him now. He believed that Beardsley had kept track of Hanson; that he knew where he had been all the while, and that he had brought him back to fill out his unexpired term as overseer, because he had failed to induce Marcy and his mother to employ Kelsey in his place. Hanson would make it his business to get on the track of that money. He would not succeed, of course; but Mrs. Gray would not see a moment's peace during her waking hours, or enjoy a moment's refreshing sleep at night, as long as Hanson remained on the place. Oh, why was not Aleck Webster on hand to tell him what to do in a case like this?

"I knowed your maw would be looking for me to come back and finish out my time," continued Hanson, "but I was most afraid to come till I heard that the coast was clear, and I wouldn't be in no danger of being pestered by them Union men."

"There are some of them about here yet," said Marcy.

"Not many, there aint," replied the overseer, who seemed to understand the situation perfectly. "The wust of them have went into the Yankee navy; and them that's left aint men to be afraid of. Besides, I've got a body guard that won't put up with no nonsense from them or any other Union men. You know all about the Home Guards?"

"I heard of them for the first time this morning," said Marcy truthfully. "But then I have not been around much since I came home."

The last words slipped out before Marcy knew it; but Hanson seemed to take them as a matter of course, for he said in reply:

"I don't know as I blame you for keeping clost to home for a few days. You couldn't do no other way than you did do, but there's some onreasonable folks about who stick to it that you had oughter run that there gunboat on the ground. That's what Beardsley allowed to do, but they didn't give him the chance. I wouldn't like to be one who had anything to do with the burning of Beardsley's house. He's an officer in the Home Guards, a leftenant or something, and he allows to hunt them men down the first thing he does."

"Probably he knows where to look for them," said Marcy.

"If he don't he can guess pretty clost to the place," answered Hanson. "But you're all right. Nobody in this settlement is going to let harm come to you."

"When did you return, and how does it come that you are riding the captain's horse?"

"Oh, him and me has always been friends, and when he got Miss Brown to write to me in Newbern that it was safe for me to come back and work my year out on your plantation, and that he knew you and your maw was looking for me to do it, as any honest man should, I come right to his house. I've been here three days, looking round and keeping sorter clost in doors, and allow to go up to your place this afternoon."

So it seemed that there was no help for it, at least for the present. The man had told him some things he was glad to know, and talked as though he believed Marcy to be as good a rebel as he was himself. Perhaps he would be willing to go further and tell him how he, Marcy, stood in the estimation of the Home Guards.

"I suppose the object of that organization is to make Union men behave themselves," he said, at a venture.

"You're mighty right," answered Hanson. "Likewise to see that all the prisoners about here, who was paroled at the Island, go back to the army where they belong. Some of 'em have been talking agin the 'Federacy in a way we uns don't like to hear, and we're going to put a stop to all sich work as that."

"No one asked me to join, and that is the reason I knew nothing about it," continued Marcy. "When you see Beardsley, will you tell him that I want to come in?"

If he expected the man to hesitate or raise objections he was disappointed, for Hanson answered readily:

"I'll do it. You'll get in easy enough, and I know Beardsley will be glad to have you. Some of our men aint got a thing in the way of guns, and I know you wouldn't mind lend-ing some of yours that you don't need. Well, I must be piking along. I'll be up this afternoon, tell your maw."

"And it will be the worst news she ever heard," thought Marcy, as the two separated and rode away in different directions. "What he is up to now I can't imagine; but he has strong backing, I know from the way he talks. Mother has always been afraid that he would come back to trouble her, and here he is. And here am I without a friend to advise or assist me. I was almost sure that something like this would happen when Aleck Webster and his friends deserted me."

But if Aleck was gone there was at least one man in the neighborhood who was able and willing to take his place, and that was Ben Hawkins, the paroled prisoner, whom he encountered before he left Beardsley's gate a quarter of a mile behind. The man was sitting on his horse in the middle of the road, and the first words he spoke seemed to indicate that he was waiting for Marcy.

"Who was that onery looking chap I met

along here a spell ago riding Beardsley's old clay-bank?" said Hawkins. "I seen you talking to him up there."

"Oh, Mr. Hawkins," exclaimed Marcy, who had suddenly resolved to put a certain matter to the test then and there. "You saw and talked with a Federal scouting party that came through here this morning, and the officer in command told me that you are a good friend of mine. Is that so or not?"

"What do you want me to do to prove it?" asked the rebel in reply.

"Oh, a hundred things," answered Marcy. "But in the first place, do you know anything about the Home Guards?"

"Being one of 'em I oughter know all about 'em," was the reply. "But not being pizen enough agin the Unionists to suit 'em, I have sorter got it into my head that they are keeping some things from me. All the same, I know enough to be sartin sure that they mean harm to you."

"That is what I thought; and I am certain of it too, now that this Hanson has returned.

He used to be my mother's overseer, and is the man who was taken from his house and carried into the swamp."

"So that's the chap, is it?" exclaimed Hawkins. "I didn't know him, for your mother hired him after I 'listed; but I've heard as much as I want to know about him. Of course he is going back on the place to stay his time out?"

"That is what he says; but the worst of it is that he wants to make up the time he lost by being carried away. Now, is there any way in which I can stop that?"

"You can shoot him, I reckon. That's what I'd do for any man who kept shoving himself on me when he wasn't wanted, like this feller is shoving himself on you and your maw."

Marcy made no reply, for nothing he could then think of would have induced him to carry things as far as that. Hawkins understood this, and after thinking a moment he added:

"You can give his name to the fust Yankee officer you meet scouting around out here, or you can leave a note on Beardsley's gallery and Shelby's, telling them that, if they don't get him off your place in a little less than no time, some more of their buildings will go up in smoke. Where's the schooner that Beardsley used to run the blockade in? He'd ruther lose half his niggers than lose her."

"I know what you mean, but the trouble is I can't prove anything on him. I can't bear the thought of destroying his property just because I think he is persecuting me."

"If you should blame everything that has happened to you on him you would not be fur wrong," said Hawkins earnestly. "He's mighty savage agin you for not trying to make that gunboat cap'n quit putting him in irons——"

"How in the name of common sense could I stop it?" cried Marcy. "I didn't volunteer to go on that boat (I blame Jonas for that), and would Captain Benton have paid any attention to me if I had interceded for Beardsley? I might have brought myself into difficulty by it."

"Course," replied Hawkins. "A blind man could see that, but all the same Beardsley means to even up with you 'cause he was ironed and you wasn't. He is first leftenant of the Home Guards, Colonel Shelby being the captain, and he's going to take you out'n your bed some night and send you to Williamston."

"What for?" exclaimed Marcy.

"And put you in jail there," continued Hawkins. "The lock-up is jammed full of Union men already, but they'll find room for one more. And mind you, after you onct get in you'll not come out till you promise to 'list in the Confederate army. That's the way they are doing now to put patriotism into people who aint got any."

"Do you know when the Home Guards intend to come to our house?"

"No, I don't. I wisht I did, so't I could tell you when to be on the watch for 'em; but that's one of the things they aint told me, and the only way I can think of for you to beat 'em is to be on your guard night and day, beginning now."

While this conversation was going on Marcy and his companion had been riding slowly in the direction of Nashville. Just before they came within sight of the town they met a man dressed in a ragged uniform, and riding a mule that looked as though it had served through two or three hard campaigns. Marcy recognized him as a poor white of the Kelsey stamp, and Hawkins told him in a whisper that he was a paroled prisoner like himself, a friend of his, a member of his company and mess, and also a Home Guard whom the officers were not afraid to trust. If Marcy would ride on and leave him alone with the man, he might be able to obtain some information from him. Marcy was glad to agree to this programme, and it was duly carried out. He went ahead and waited half an hour in Nashville, and might have remained a still longer time had he not seen Hawkins ride a short distance down the road from the first turn, and then wheel his horse and ride back again out of sight. Taking this for a signal, Marcy mounted his filly and set out for home; and, as he expected, found Hawkins in the lonely place in the road where he had held two interviews with Aleck Webster. He thought the man looked very sober, but before he could speak of it Hawkins said, in a thrilling whisper:

"Mister Marcy, you aint safe in this here settlement one hour longer. I dunno but you had oughter be out of it now."

"What did that friend of yours tell you?" asked the boy, with a desperate effort to appear calm, although he knew that his face was as white as it could be.

"He said the Home Guards have got things fixed jest as they want 'em, and that they are liable to begin operations any time," answered Hawkins, who looked as uneasy as Marcy felt. "Beardsley won't hear to nothing but that you must be got rid of the very fust thing. You know too much to be let loose any longer."

"I know that Beardsley was a smuggler, and believe I could have made trouble for him by saying that much to Captain Benton; but I did not do it," replied Marcy. "I hadn't the heart to do it, and neither did I think he would dare do anything to me so long as the Yankees are so thick about here."

"There's where you made the biggest kind of a mistake," said the rebel, in a tone of disgust. "I don't see why you were so easy on him when you know that he is doing all he can to pester you. My advice to you is to leave this very night."

"But where shall I go?" cried Marcy. "And how do I know but they will take some sort of vengeance on my mother if they fail to find me?"

"Beardsley won't do the first thing to her, for mean as the Home Guards are, there's some among 'em, and one of 'em is talking to you at this minute, who won't by no means stand by and see him go as far as *that.* But if she should see them snake you out'n the house and tote you off to jail, don't you reckon that would worry her? Your best plan is to light out while you can."

"But you have not yet told me where to go," Marcy reminded him.

"Put straight to the swamp and find those Union men," replied the rebel. "There's some of 'em there now."

"But I don't know where to find them. The swamps along the coast cover a good deal of ground——"

"I know where to find 'em," interrupted Hawkins. "Now, I'll tell you what to do: you go straight home, pack up any little things you want to take with you for comfort, and when night comes get into one of your boats and put straight down the bayou for Middle River. Look out fur yourself, fur it's likely that the Yankees have posted sentries all along the river, and if they chuck you into the guard-house, there's no telling when they will turn you loose. It might put you to some trouble to prove that you aint a Confederate spy. And when you get into Middle River t'other side of Plymouth, you will find a friend on the bank who will tell you what to do."

"Who will he be? What shall I call him?" asked Marcy.

"He will be old man Webster, the father of that sailor who promised to stand by you through thick and thin, and then went off and 'listed. He's home now, and as soon as I leave you, I'll ride straight down to his house and tell him what sort of 'rangement me and you have come to. Oh, I am all right with the Union men, even if I do wear a gray jacket; and if they aint afraid to trust me you needn't be."

"I am not afraid to trust you," Marcy hastened to say. "But I don't like to leave mother. It looks cowardly."

"You want her to have some peace of mind, don't you?" demanded Hawkins, almost angrily. "Well, she'll see a heap more of it if you will do as I tell you and clear yourself, than she will if you stay to home. As long as I am foot-loose, I'll make it my business to go to your house as often as any of the Home Guards go there, and the first one who don't do jest right will have to answer to me fur it."

"I thank you for the assurance," began Marcy.

"I aint got no time to hear you talk that a way," exclaimed the rebel. "What I want to know is whether you are going to foller my advice or not."

Marcy said very emphatically that he was.

"'Cause, if you don't, you are liable to be started on the road to jail before this time to-morrer," added Hawkins.

"I'll do just as you have told me, and there's my hand on it," replied Marcy. "You will be sure to arrange matters so that Mr. Webster will meet me on the river?"

The soldier assured him that he could be depended on to do as he had agreed, and after another lingering hand-shake they separated, Hawkins to carry out his part of the programme, and Marcy to take a budget of most unwelcome news to his mother. But she bore up under it better than he did. She declared that her heart would be much lighter if she knew her son was in full possession of his liberty, even though he was compelled to hide in the swamp for the time being, than it would be if she were called upon to remember, every hour in the day, that he was shut up in jail, with a fair prospect before him of being forced into the Confederate army, and she urged him to carry out Hawkins's instructions to the very letter. And in order to show him that she meant he should do that very thing, she began at once to pack his valise. When she left the room for a few minutes, Marcy, having become satisfied that Hawkins's plan was the best, and in fact the only one that could be followed under the circumstances, seated himself at the desk, pulled out a sheet of foolscap paper, and began writing a short note upon it. While thus engaged his face wore a most determined expression, and when the note was finished he put it into his pocket. But he said nothing to his mother about it.

The hours were a long time in dragging themselves away, but Marcy and his mother had many small details to arrange and many things to talk about, and only once was he out of her presence. That was when he made a trip to the creek, in company with Julius, to select the boat that was to take him down the river. He raised the black boy very high in his own estimation by making a confidant of him and promising to take him along as his servant, and in order to provide against the upsetting of his plan by some awkward blunder on the part of Julius, he told him just what he was going to do when darkness came to conceal his movements, and how he intended to do it. It was well for him that he went to so much trouble, as we shall presently see.

When the afternoon was about half spent Hanson and his trunk made their appearance in one of Beardsley's wagons, and Mrs. Gray and Marcy listened to his story in the kitchen—the only room about the house to which the man had ever been admitted. And the kitchen wasn't in the house, but a short distance away from it, and under its own roof. The overseer made his statement to Mrs. Gray in much the same words that he had made it to Marcy; and when the lady made a mistake by saying that, after the experience he had already had with the Union men, she should think he would be afraid to return to that plantation, the man answered in tones so insolent and savage that Marcy felt inclined to resent them on the spot.

"Them villains toted me off onct, Miss Gray, but they won't never do it again. I know who they were, I've got friends enough around me to hang every one of 'em, and I'm going to do it before I ever leave this place. You hear me?"

Those were the words he used, but his manner seemed to say: "I am on this plantation with the intention of remaining. I came for a purpose, and you dare not turn me off." Marcy understood that to be his meaning, and made up his mind that he and Hanson would have a settlement in a very few days. Mrs. Gray understood him, but she did not give expression to the fears that came upon her, for she knew that by so doing she would dishearten her son who, just then, needed all the encouragement she could give him.

It began to grow dark about supper time, and Julius came slouching into the sitting-room as if he had no particular business there, but in reality to listen to the instructions that Marcy had promised to have ready for him at that time.

"You will find the guns and things that you are to hide on the floor of my room," said the boy. "My revolvers, fowling-piece, and a good supply of ammunition are on my bed; but you must not touch them. They are to go with us to the swamp. Be as sly as you can, for, if the Home Guards catch you at the work, they will give you something you never had yet—a striped shirt."

During the next hour Julius was in and out of the house several times, and on each occasion he took something away with him ; while Marcy and his mother sat side by side on the sofa trying, as Marcy put it, "to do talking enough to last them during the separation that was soon to come." At last Julius moved silently along the hall and appeared at the door of the sitting-room with a heavy valise in his hand, and a bundle of quilts and blankets thrown over his shoulder.

"Dis all," he whispered, in his short, jerky way, "an' you best be gettin' out'n dar. Good-by, missus. Julius gwine run now like ole Mose."

"You haven't seen or heard anything suspicious, have you?"

"Oh, hursh, honey," was the reply. "If Julius hear sumfin, don't you reckon he got sense 'nough to tell? You best be gettin' out'n dar 'fore dey come. Good-by, missus."

"Go ahead with those things, and I will be at the boat by the time you are," said Marcy.

Julius disappeared, but it was not so easy for his master to follow him as it was to talk about it. He found it hard to tear himself away, and lingered long over the parting—so long, in fact, that Julius grew tired of waiting for him. He placed the valise and blankets in the bow of the boat, made sure for the twentieth time that the little craft was ready for the start, and then sauntered back to the house to see why Marcy did not come. But he did not find the coast clear this time. Just as he was passing through the gate he heard a slight rustling in the bushes that lined the carriage-way on both sides. Without waiting a second to see what made the noise, the quick-witted darky took to his heels; but, before he had made half a dozen steps, a man stepped into the carriage-way in front of him and seized him by the arm. Julius looked up, and saw that he was in the grasp of Captain Beardsley.

"None of that, you little varmint," said the captain. "You stay here with me."

As he spoke he tightened his grasp and began dragging his prisoner toward the concealment from which he had just emerged; whereupon the black boy set up a yell that could have been heard half a mile away. And what was more, he kept on yelling until Beardsley clapped his big hand over his mouth, and put a stop to the performance.

CHAPTER XVII.

MARCY TAKES TO THE SWAMP.

THE little darky was not very badly frightened on his own account—he never got that way unless he saw or heard something he could not understand—but he was overwhelmed with anxiety for Marcy Gray, who had not yet left the presence of his mother. Julius believed that the dwelling had been surrounded by the Home Guards while he was stowing the valise and blankets in the boat, and if that proved to be the case, Marcy would in all probability start for Williamston jail instead of the swamp. The black boy thought of these things in an instant of time, and did what he could to upset the plans of the Home Guards by yelling at the top of his voice.

"Keep still, you little fule," said Beardsley, in an angry whisper. "Nobody's going to hurt you."

"Aint, hey?" exclaimed a second man, who at that moment came upon the scene. "I'll hurt him to-morrow, I bet you; I'll have him brung into the field; and he has heard me talk often enough to know what them words mean."

Just then Julius succeeded in freeing himself from Beardsley's grasp, and it was well for him that he did so, for the man had almost smothered him by holding his nose between his thumb and fore-finger at the same time that he covered his mouth with the rest of his hand. The negro gasped once or twice, and then sank to the ground like a piece of wet rope.

"All right. Let him lay there till he gets ready to get up," said Captain Beardsley. "Where's the men? Where's Shelby!"

"The men started on a run for the house the minute that black villain yelled," replied Hanson; for he was the one who came to Beardsley's assistance. "Shelby is round on the other side watching the back door, and he sent me to see what the fursing was about. Now I'll go back and tell him."

"And be sure that you and him keep out of sight when Marcy is brought out," cautioned Beardsley. "You don't want to let him get a sight at ary one of you, for there's no telling when he will have the power on his own side."

The overseer hastened away, trusting more to the darkness than to the bushes in the yard to conceal him from Mrs. Gray's view and Marcy's, should either of them chance to look out at the window, and the captain moved a few steps nearer to the carriage-way, so that he could look at the house through the branches of an evergreen. When he first peeped out the front windows were all dark; but presently lights began to appear here and there, heavy steps and loud angry voices were heard in the house, and finally the front door opened, and a man, carrying a lighted lamp in his hand, came out and walked the whole length of it. Captain Beardsley was surprised, and he felt uncomfortable, too. If the boy of whom they were in search was in the house he ought to have been discovered before this time; and if he had escaped, where could he have gone unless it was to Plymouth or to the Union men who were hidden in the swamp? If he had gone to either place Captain Beardsley knew it meant the loss of more buildings to him and Colonel Shelby.

"And if he's went off it is bekase some traitor or 'nother in our company told him he'd better," soliloquized Beardsley, when he saw the lights shining from the windows of the upper rooms. "Julius, come here. I want to ask you something."

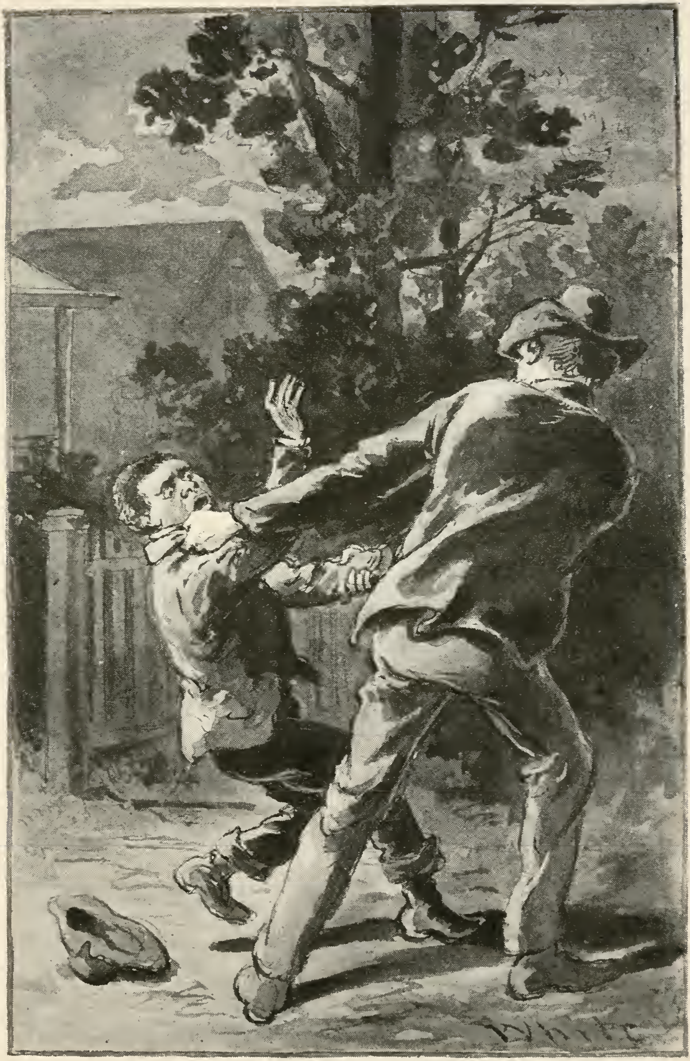
The black boy had by this time recovered his breath and strength enough to sit up. He had all his wits about him, and was as much interested in what was going on in the house as Captain Beardsley himself. He saw the lights ascend from the lower rooms to those in the second story, and finally he saw them in the garret and in the observatory on the roof; and when no shout of triumph, or any sound to indicate that there was a disturbance in the house, came to his ears to tell him that his master had been traced to his hiding-place and captured, the wild hope seized upon him that Marcy, in some mysterious manner, had succeeded in eluding the Home Guards. If that was the case he would of course make the best of his way to the boat; and if he got there before Julius did he would shove off alone, and Julius would be left behind to labor under the lash of the overseer. He thought he would rather die than do that, but how could he escape from Beardsley and reach the creek in time to meet Marcy there? When he heard the captain calling to him he got upon his feet and approached the carriage-way, just as Beardsley bent his head almost to the ground, to watch a light that was shining from one of the cellar windows. He held that position for a moment, and then a roar like that of a thousand Niagaras rang in his ears and all was blank to him. He sank limp and motionless to the ground, while Julius took to his heels and disappeared through the gate. Half an hour later, when the Home Guards came out of the house without finding Marcy Gray or anything that could be used as evidence against him, they were astounded and greatly alarmed to find Captain Beardsley lying unconscious in the carriage-way.

And where was Marcy all this time? When the black boy's first note of warning fell upon his ear he was imprinting a farewell kiss upon his mother's lips and giving her a last embrace; but they fell apart instantly when they heard that wild cry, for they knew what it meant.

"There they are!" gasped Mrs. Gray. "Marcy, I am afraid I have detained you too long."

"You have not kept me a moment," said Marcy quickly, "for I was no more anxious to go than you were to have me. Keep them in the house as long as you can, and I will go into the cellar and try to slip through one of the windows into the garden. Poor Julius will be broken-hearted when he finds that I went without him. Once more good-by, and don't expect to see me under a week."

Pressing as the need for haste was, Marcy snatched another farewell kiss and ran out of the room, taking care not to pass between a window and a lamp that stood on the centre-table. He caught his cap from the rack as he hurried through the hall, and in less time than it takes to tell it, was standing before an open



Julius gives the Alarm.

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cellar window, waiting and listening. His ears told him when the Home Guards charged upon the house and entered it through the back and side doors, and believing that the sentries, if there had been any posted outside, would be wholly engrossed with what was going on in the dwelling, he seized upon that particular moment to make his attempt at escape. Slowly and carefully he crawled up into the window, and when he raised his head above the ground all he could see were bushes and trees and a starlit sky, and all he could hear was the murmur of voices in the sitting-room. If the doors were guarded, as it was reasonable to suppose they were, this particular cellar window was not, and Marcy made haste to crawl out of it and across an intervening flower-bed to the friendly shelter of a thicket of bushes beyond. He did not linger there an instant, but taking it for granted that Ben Hawkins was with the Home Guards, and remembering that the man had promised to see that they behaved themselves while they were in his mother's house, he started at once for the creek, crawling on his hands and knees until he was sure he had passed beyond the sentries that he thought ought to have been left in the yard, and then he sprang up and ran like a deer. He hardly knew when he reached the fence, over which he went as easily as though he had been furnished with wings, but he knew when he halted on the bank of the creek and caught Julius in the act of shoving off with the boat. Thinking only of Captain Beardsley and the overseer and his whip, the frightened black boy could not be prevailed upon to stop until he had pushed the boat to the middle of the stream, where he felt comparatively safe; and then he looked over his shoulder to see who his pursuer was.

"Why, honey!" he exclaimed, as he got out the oars and backed the boat toward the place where Marcy was standing. "Was dat you? What you doin' hyar? How come dey don't cotch you in de house?"

"Come here quick, and take me on board," replied Marcy; and he continued, as he stepped into the stern of the boat and picked up the paddle he had provided for a steering oar: "What do you mean by trying to desert me in this fashion; and was that you yelling a while ago?"

"Yes sar, Marse Mahcy, it was Julius done dat yellin', an' I done it kase I aint want Cap'n Beardsley to cotch you in de house," answered the boy, as he laid out his strength on the oars, and sent the boat swiftly away from the bank.

"Are you sure that Beardsley was with those men?" asked Marcy earnestly. "Think twice before you speak, or you may be the means of making me do something that I shall be sorry for as long as I live."

"Julius don't need to think no two times 'fore he answer dat question. De cap'n was dar, an' so was de oberseer. I know, kase de cap'n squoze my arm till it blacker'n my skin. An' de oberseer 'low to take me to de field in de mawnin'."

"If Beardsley had you by the arm how did you manage to get away from him?" said Marcy, who had good reason for wishing to be sure of his ground.

"Well, sar, moster, I buck him; dat's de way I got loose from de cap'n. He scrooch down dis a way, so he kin look in de suller," said Julius, bending forward until his back was nearly on a level with the gunwales of the boat, "an' I whack him behine de ear, an' he drap so quick he don't know what hit him. Dat's de troof, sure's you born."

Marcy did not doubt it, for if Beardsley had been foolish enough to place himself in that position while Julius was within reach of him, the black boy could have knocked him senseless without any trouble at all. He was the acknowledged champion "bucker" of the neighborhood, and had been known to do such things. The most pugnacious among the little darkies would scream out in terror, and seek safety in flight, if Julius raised one foot from the ground and hopped toward him on the other with his head lowered threateningly, and there was not one among them with a head hard enough to stand against him for a moment if Julius succeeded in catching him by the ears. He could double up the strongest negro on the plantation by butting him in the pit of the stomach, and he would do it if one of them incurred his displeasure, even though he had to wait a month to find his opportunity. And he told nothing but the truth when he said that he had knocked Captain Beardsley down in that way. All he wanted now was a chance at the overseer. He knew that Mrs. Gray and Marcy did not want him on the place, and consequently Julius did not think he would be punished for butting him "good fashion."

"Did Beardsley or Hanson say anything about me?" was Marcy's next question.

"All I heard de cap'n say was dat de oberseer an' Shelby want to watch out dat you don't see 'em when you come out'n de house," replied Julius. "Dey don't want you to know dey was dar."

Julius gave way strong on the oars and Marcy steered the boat, listened for sounds of pursuit, and thought over the situation. He made up his mind to one thing before he had left the house fairly out of sight, and that was that Captain Beardsley and Colonel Shelby would be sorry that they had had anything to do with the Home Guards. His patience was all gone now, and every move they made should be met by a counter-movement on his own part. He thought he knew the name of every man in the company, and he would take pains to see that the Federal commander at Plymouth knew them also and where they lived; and while he was waiting for the Yankees to do something he would do something himself, beginning that very night.

Having at last satisfied himself that the Home Guards were not pursuing him, Marcy dismissed them from his mind for the present, his actions indicating that he was looking for some object he expected to find in the creek in advance of him. He was searching for Beardsley's schooner, and was so long in finding it that he began to fear her owner had stolen a march upon him by towing her from the creek to a safer hiding-place. But the captain evidently thought she could not be in any safer berth than the one she had always occupied in the creek in front of his house, for there was where Marcy found her, as he was on the point of giving up the search and telling Julius to pull for Middle River the best he knew how, for there was a man waiting for them there.

"It seems a pity to destroy a fine vessel like this," said Marcy, as Julius caught the fore chains and allowed the current to swing the boat broadside to the *Hattie.*

"Well, den, what for dat rebel burn all dem fine ships out on de watah like Marse Jack tell about?" demanded Julius. "An' what for de cap'n brung all dem Home Gyards to de house to cotch you an' tote you off to jail?"

With all Beardsley's persecutions so fresh in his mind, Marcy Gray did not stand upon the order of going to work but went at once. Before Julius ceased speaking he was over the schooner's rail, with a bag of "fat" wood in one hand and an axe in the other. The hatches were fastened down of course, and the door that gave entrance to the cabin was locked; but the latter yielded to a single heavy blow with the axe, and Marcy went in and emptied his bag of kindling wood upon the floor. Then he piled upon it everything he found in the cabin that he could move, including the slats in the bunks, the tables and chairs, and the doors that he could tear from their hinges. Over all he poured a couple of quarts of oil from bottles that he had brought with him for the purpose, and set fire to it in three or four different places. He waited until he saw the work of destruction fairly begun, and then ran on deck and dropped into the boat.

"Now set me ashore at the foot of that poplar to which the breast-line is made fast," said he. "I want Beardsley to know who did this work, and why it was done. But of course he knows without any telling."

"Hi yi, Marse Mahcy, she gwine go right up in de elemunts!" cried Julius, as a cloud of smoke, which was brightly illumined by the fire that was blazing beneath, came pouring out of the cabin-door.

"I think I made a sure thing of it," answered Marcy. "Of course she will burn readily, for everything in the cabin is covered with paint or varnish. We can't get away from here any too quick. Hurry up."

It did not take Julius more than two minutes to row around the stern of the schooner to the tree to which the breast-line was fastened, nor did it take Marcy longer than that to spring ashore and place upon a neighboring tree, in a conspicuous position where it would be sure to catch the eye of the first man who passed that way, the note which he had written that afternoon while his mother was packing his valise. It was addressed to Captain Beardsley, and ran as follows :

> This is to pay you for the share you had in bringing Hanson back to our plantation, and in organizing the Home Guards to take me to Williamston Jail. This is the first payment on a big debt I owe you and Colonel Shelby. If you do not wish any more like it take Hanson away from our place at once and keep him away ; and furthermore, keep everybody else away from there. You are on a false scent, and so long as you follow it, so long will you continue to lose property. There is no large sum of money in or around the house. When you become satisfied of that fact perhaps you will cease troubling my mother.

Placing this note on the side of the tree opposite the fire so that it would not be scorched by the heat, and fastening it there with three or four wooden pins so that the wind would not blow it away, Marcy ran back to the boat, and Julius once more pushed out into the stream. He turned to look behind him every few minutes, but the boat was pulled into Middle River, and perhaps two or three miles down its swift current toward the coast, before he saw any signs of the fire he had left behind; and at the moment his eye caught its first faint reflection on the clouds, he heard a cautious hail from the bank.

"Boat ahoy!" came through the darkness in tones that were just loud enough to attract his attention.

"Who is it?" demanded Marcy, picking up the loaded gun that lay beside him in the stern-sheets. "Way enough, Julius."

"Mebbe dat aint de man you want see," replied the boy, handling the oars as if he meant to turn the boat toward the opposite bank.

"I am Aleck Webster's father," said the voice, in answer to Marcy's question. "Ben Hawkins sent me here to show you the way to our camp."

"When did you see Hawkins?" inquired Marcy.

"This afternoon; and he told me that the Home Guards were likely to drive you away from home to-night. It's all right, Mister Marcy."

The latter was so sure of it that he at once turned the boat toward the point from which the voice came (the night was so dark that he could not see anything but bushes and trees on the bank), and in two minutes more was standing by Mr. Webster's side. The man pointed toward the bright spot on the clouds and said, in a voice that Marcy recognized this time:

"Are the Home Guards out to-night?"

"Oh, yes; they're out, and came to my mother's house, or I shouldn't be here now. But they didn't set anything on fire so far as I know."

"Then whose work is that? There's something burning off that way."

"It is the work of *Marcy, the Refugee.* That's I. After persecuting me for months in every way he could think of, Beardsley has driven me from home at last, and I set fire to his schooner to pay him for it."

"I am a refugee myself," replied Mr. Webster. "And there's my hand, which says that I will stand your friend as long as you need one. If the Home Guards had been organized a few weeks sooner Aleck would not have left us old men and boys to fight our battles alone. But he had an idea that the presence of the Yankees on the coast would serve as a protection to us; and there's where he was wrong. If we don't do something at once, they will follow us into the swamp and kill or capture the last one of us. That fight in Hampton Roads put life and energy into them."

"I don't see why it should. They got the worst of it."

"Are you sure?" exclaimed Mr. Webster. "I heard that we got the worst of it; that some of our best ships were sunk or burned."

"Will it be quite safe for us to stop here long enough to have a snack?" said Marcy. "Then, Julius, you may hand out that brown basket; the one with the napkin spread over the top. I'm hungry, and I suppose you are, Mr. Webster, for you have walked from your home since Hawkins saw you this afternoon. By the way, where is Hawkins now?"

"He will hang around the settlement as long as he can, and take to the woods only when he sees that preparations are being made to compel him to go back to the army. Didn't you see him with the Home Guards to-night?"

Marcy replied that he did not see anybody, for he ran before the Home Guards came into the house. If Hawkins was with them, as he had promised to be, Marcy was satisfied that no indignity had been offered to his mother.

By this time Julius had made the boat fast to a tree on the bank and come ashore with the lunch; and while Marcy and his new friend were eating the cold bread and meat he passed over to them, the former gave a true history of that battle in Hampton Roads as he learned it from the papers Captain Burrows left with him. Then he gave a short account of his experience and dealings with Captain Beardsley, so that the man might know just how much reason he had to stand in fear of him, and finally he inquired how many men there were in Mr. Webster's party, and where and how they lived. He learned that there was an even score of them now, seven of their number (one of whom was Ben Hawkins) being paroled prisoners, who declared that they would fight rather than go back to the army. It had been the habit of the original members of the band to go into the woods whenever they desired to talk about things that they didn't want their rebel neighbors to know; but ever since they heard of the Home Guards, whose avowed object it was to send all the Union men they could find to Williamston Jail, they had become refugees in earnest, some of them having taken up their permanent abode in the camp. Those who had families to look out for now and then visited their homes during the daytime; but judging by the way things looked now, that small privilege would soon be denied them.

"And when it comes so that we can't see our folks for fear of being shot, or marched off to jail, we'll take to visiting them in the nighttime," said Mr. Webster, in concluding his story. "And if we have to do that, we'll light fires to show us the way back to camp."

Having disposed of a good share of the contents of the brown basket, Mr. Webster declared that it was time for them to start for the camp, which was located in one of Captain Beardsley's wood lots, and not more than five miles away. He said that, as long as Captain Beardsley continued to trouble him and his friends, they would sleep on his grounds, warm themselves and cook their meals over fires built with wood that was cut from his trees, steal his corn meal and bacon, and shoot his hogs as often as they came within range of the camp. Mr. Webster's canoe was close by, and when he stepped into it he fastened the painter of Marcy's boat to a cleat in the stern, so that the two little crafts would not become separated in the darkness. It might require some talking to bring them together again, and they did not want to do much of that until they were safe in camp. As they shoved off from the bank they took a last look at that bright spot on the clouds, which had been growing brighter and larger every moment since it appeared, bearing unmistakable testimony to the destructive work that was going on beneath it. If the fire had attracted the attention of the Home Guards (and Marcy did not see how it could be otherwise), they did not reach the creek in time to save the schooner. Marcy wondered what Captain Beardsley's feelings were about that time.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CONCLUSION.

WHEN Marcy Gray opened his eyes the next morning at daylight, he was in the camp of the refugees, which was to be his home, at irregular intervals, for long months to come, and surrounded by men who, like himself, were being persecuted for their opinions' sake. The camp was located on an island in a remote corner of the swamp that Marcy had never seen before, although he had hunted through the country for miles on every side of his mother's plantation. In the middle of the island was a cleared space, perhaps fifty feet in diameter, and all the bushes and trees that had been cut from it were piled around the circumference, to serve the double purpose of wind-break and breastwork. There were no horses or mules among the refugees to make a trail through the woods that could be followed by the Home Guards and soldiers, and no dogs to attract their attention by their baying; but there were canoes and boats in plenty, and, except when in use, they were concealed in the bushes, so that they could not be seen from the mainland. There were several snug lean-tos in the camp, to which the refugees retreated in stormy weather; but, when the elements were friendly, they preferred to wrap themselves in their blankets, and sleep under the trees. When the newcomer opened his eyes on this particular morning, the first object they rested on was the bearded face of Ben Hawkins, the paroled prisoner. He was lying under the same tree, and had been waiting half an hour for Marcy to wake up.

"I reckon it does you good to sleep in the open air," were the first words he spoke.

"Want of sleep is something that never troubles me," was the reply. "Were you out with the Home Guards last night? And how did they treat my mother after they got into the house?"

"Didn't I say that the first one amongst 'em who looked cross-ways at her, or said anything out of the way, would have to answer to me for it?" demanded Hawkins. "I said that much to 'em before we went into your yard; and—well, them Home Guards know me."

"I assure you that I shall not forget it," said Marcy gratefully. "I hope you did not say or do anything to add to their suspicions. You know you told me they were afraid to trust you. And why did you come here instead of going home?"

"I don't care a cent if they distrust me now more'n they did before," answered Hawkins. "I'm watching 'em, and they'll have to get up in the morning to get the start of me. And I come to camp to see if you was here, and find out if it was that little nigger's yelling that warned you."

"That was just it," replied Marcy. "If Beardsley hadn't caught him, he would surely have caught me. What did Beardsley have to say for himself?"

"He was purty bad hurt, I tell you; and we had to hold him in the hoss-trough for as much as a minute before he came to. He's bound to kill that nigger. He didn't see him have no club in his hand when he ketched him."

"Julius never struck him with a club," exclaimed Marcy. "He gave him a butt under the ear."

The Confederate uttered an ejaculation indicative of the greatest astonishment, and then he sat up on his blanket, reached over Marcy's shoulder, and began throwing aside the leaves and branches until he uncovered a gray quilt. This he pulled off in spite of the desperate efforts of some one beneath to prevent it, and when he drew the quilt over Marcy's shoulder, he brought with it the boy Julius, who was highly enraged because his dreamless slumber had been so rudely disturbed.

"Did you like to butt the life out of Cap'n Beardsley last night?" inquired Hawkins. "Come here, and let me see how hard your head is."

"Take you' hands off'n dat head," sputtered Julius. "I buck one rebel las' night, an' you want watch out dat I don't buck nodder one dis mawning." Then he became good-natured all at once, for he thought of something he wanted to ask Hawkins. "What Beardsley say when he seen his fine schooner go up in de clouds?"

"He was mad and sorry and skeered," answered Hawkins. "I'll bet you, Mister Marcy, that he plum forgot about that schooner, or he wouldn't have been in such a hurry to help Shelby raise the Home Guards. Of course we rode hard for the fire as soon as we seen it, but we couldn't do no good after we got there. The schooner was too far gone."

"Did Beardsley find the note I left for him?" asked Marcy.

"Shelby found it and give it to him; and it was when he read it that he looked sorry and skeered. It was lucky you wrote it, for it kept some of the Home Guards from being killed."

"How do you make that out?"

"Just this a way," answered Hawkins. "They allowed, after they got through with you, to go to the houses of two more Union men so't you would have company when you was took to jail. But when Shelby heard your letter read he put for his home quick's he could go, some others who lived up his way went with him, and that sorter broke up the party. Leastwise it didn't leave enough to capture them two Union men, who I knew were on the watch and ready to shoot. I went to their houses afterward, and brought them into the swamp with me. They're getting mighty tired of living in this way, and they allow to rise up and drive Beardsley and Shelby out'n the country. There wouldn't be no trouble in the settlement if them two was out of it."

"That is what I think," said Marcy, "and I wish that plan might be put into operation this very day. What is the use of putting it off? I'll help."

While this conversation was going on the other refugees had begun to show signs of returning life and energy, and as fast as they arose from their blankets they came up to greet Marcy, who was not much surprised to find that he could call every one of them by name. Those who had rendered him such good service on the night those Newbern robbers raided his mother's house made themselves known, and of course received the hearty thanks of the boy they had saved from being hung up by the neck. One of them remarked that he wished he and his friends had served Hanson as they had served the robbers, and this led Marcy to believe that they had made short work with them; but he asked no questions.

For men in their circumstances the refugees were the most jovial lot Marcy Gray had ever seen. Having learned the art of foraging to perfection they lived on the best the country afforded; they were so well armed that it would not pay the authorities to try to capture them, even if they had known right where to find them; and the secessionists in the settlement who had property to lose would not permit the Confederate soldiers to molest their wives and children if they could possibly help it. But, as Hawkins said, they were becoming tired of living in this way, and were talking seriously of taking matters into their own hands. If the Federal garrison at Plymouth could not protect them, they would protect themselves. That was what Marcy Gray had made up his mind to do, and it was his intention to begin operations that very day. As soon as breakfast was over he drew Hawkins off on one side and took him into his confidence by unfolding the plans he had in his head. One was to make a prisoner of his mother's overseer and take him to Plymouth; and while there, to give the Federal commander the names of the men who belonged to the Home Guards and tell him what they were organized for. And lastly he would write letters to Beardsley and Shelby, telling them that if they did not move away at once and go among the Confederates, where they ought to have gone long ago, the men whom they had forced to find refuge in the swamp would destroy everything they had.

"I'm with you heart and soul, all except going among the Yankees," said Hawkins, after Marcy had made him understand what he had on his mind. "I'm sorter jubus that they won't let me come away when I want to. Why couldn't we bushwhack Hanson, and not go nigh Plymouth at all?"

"Shoot him behind his back?" cried Marcy. "Look here, Hawkins, I hope you are not that sort. I never could look my mother in the face if I should consent to that. Haven't you something to show that you are a paroled prisoner?"

"Not the first thing. One of my officers signed for me."

"All right. Then you stand by me till we capture and tie Hanson, and I will take him down the river myself. I have something in my pocket that will bring me home all right. And while I am gone you will deliver a couple of letters for me, will you not?"

Oh, yes; Hawkins was perfectly willing to do that, and when he delivered the warning letters he would add a few words of his own that would perhaps emphasize what Marcy wrote. Being satisfied with his promise the boy hastened to hunt up the portfolio he had been thoughtful enough to bring with him, and while he wrote the letters which he hoped would forever relieve the community of the meanest men in it, his Confederate friend busied himself in telling all the rest of the refugees what he was writing about. Marcy's energy was contagious; and by the time he and Hawkins and Julius were ready to start on their mission, half the men in camp were writing similar notes, to be delivered to certain obnoxious persons by other paroled prisoners. Every one of them would have been glad to "see Marcy through," as they expressed it, if he would agree that Hanson should be bushwhacked instead of being turned over to the Yankees. Although they were strong Union men, they might not be able to prove it to the satisfaction of the Federals, and for that reason they did not care to put themselves in their power.

"And I don't blame you for it," said Marcy. "I wouldn't dare go among them myself if I wasn't sure they would let me come home again. I don't need any help, except such as Hawkins is willing to give me. If I once get Hanson afloat, I shall take him to Plymouth, unless he throws himself into the river; and I know he isn't the man to do that."

Everything being ready for the start, Marcy and his two companions crossed to the mainland in one of the canoes which they concealed among the bushes when they reached the bank, and set out for Mrs. Gray's house, holding such a course that they would pass one of Beardsley's fields on the way. They expected to find him at work there with his negroes, and they were not disappointed. When they discovered him, Marcy drew his letters from his pocket and handed one of them to Hawkins, who, after telling him where he would find him again at the end of half an hour, climbed the fence and set out across the field. Marcy waited until he came up with Beardsley and handed him the letter, and then resumed his walk, arriving at the place of meeting just about the time that Hawkins got there. The latter was laughing all over.

"You writ him a pretty sassy letter, didn't you?" said he.

"I told him what I want him to do, and what he may expect if he doesn't do it," was Marcy's reply. "What did he say?"

"He wanted to know where I got the letter, and I told him I was hog-hunting in the woods and met a Union man, who asked me would I give it to him, and I said I would," answered Hawkins. "Then he got mad and whooped and hollered, and said he'd be shot if he stirred one step away from his home; but I reckon he thought better of it when I told him that Miss Gray's overseer would be in Plymouth to-night, and that a squad of Yankee cavalry would be looking for him and Shelby to-morrer. That was all right, wasn't it?"

"Perfectly right. I don't care a cent what starts him, so long as he starts. Now for Hanson. We ought to find him in a field about a quarter of a mile away in this direction. I am afraid he will run when he sees me."

"If he does I'll stop him," replied Hawkins, patting the butt of a long squirrel-rifle he carried on his shoulder.

For the first time in many months things seemed to be working in Marcy's favor; for when he and his companion came within sight of the field in which Hanson ought to have found employment that day for Mrs. Gray's hands, he was there, and he did not see them until after they had crossed the fence and made considerable progress toward him. The sight of Marcy made Hanson uneasy—his actions proved that—and it is probable that he would have taken to his heels if the boy had not been in the company of a Confederate soldier who was also a member of the Home Guards. Still he must have feared treachery, for when Marcy approached close enough to speak to him, he saw that his face was very white, and that his hands trembled so violently he could scarcely hold his knife and the stick he was trying to cut.

"Morning, gentlemen," said he with a strong effort to appear at his ease. "Fine morning, this morning."

"Cicero," said Marcy, addressing one of the field hands and paying no sort of attention to the overseer's greeting, "unless you receive other orders from my mother, you will have charge of this work until I return. Hanson is going with me."

"With you, Mister Marcy!" said the man, in a weak voice. "The missus done told me to come out here."

"She gave you no orders whatever, and you have not seen her this morning. I order you to get ready to go to Plymouth," answered Marcy; whereupon Hawkins placed his rifle upon the ground and drew a rope from one of his pockets.

Never in his life had Marcy seen a man so astonished and frightened as the overseer was at that moment. He dared not resist, and he could not speak when Hawkins drew his arms behind his back and fastened them there with the rope. As to the negroes, who were quick to understand the situation, they would have danced and shouted for joy had they not known that such a demonstration would be displeasing to their young master; so they contented themselves with bringing forward one of their number, who bared his brawny shoulder, and by the action called Marcy's attention to a long ugly-looking welt that had been left there by a blow from the overseer's raw-hide.

"Whoop!" yelled Julius; and, to quote from the field hands, he immediately "drapped his wing"; that is to say, he humped up his shoulders and back, dropped his chin upon his breast, raised one foot from the ground, and began hopping toward the overseer on the other. In a minute more Hanson would have been served as Captain Beardsley was the night before, if Marcy had not put a stop to the little darky's antics by taking hold of his collar and giving him a twist that sent him ten feet away.

"I know what you uns are going to do, and I aint no ways scared of you," said Hanson, who at last mustered up courage enough to speak; but his white face and trembling limbs belied his words. "My friends will make you suffer for this."

"That's all right," said Hawkins cheerfully. "If they don't leave the country this very night, like they have been told to do, you will see 'em in Plymouth to-morrer. Now, will you go peaceable, or shall I walk you along by the neck?"

The Confederate soldier picked up his rifle and waved his hand in the direction of the great house, and the prisoner started toward it without hesitating or saying another word; while Marcy ran on ahead to tell his mother what he had done. Although the field was in plain sight no one about the house had noticed that there was anything unusual going on, and Marcy went in at the side door and made his way to his mother's room before she knew he was on the plantation. Marcy did some rapid talking, for time was precious, and he might be in danger as long as he remained with her; but he told her of everything that had happened to him since the Home Guards drove him from home, and when he said that he and Julius were on their way to Plymouth to deliver Hanson into the hands of the Federals, she did not try to turn him from his purpose. She simply said that she thought he was engaged in a desperate undertaking.

"Desperate cases require desperate remedies," answered Marcy, looking out of the window just as Hawkins and his prisoner passed by. The soldier was walking by Hanson's side and Julius was acting as rear-guard, advancing first on one foot and then on the other, and all the while shaking his head as if he were possessed by an almost irresistible desire to plant it in the small of the overseer's back. "Here he is now," continued Marcy. "Come and take a last look at him."

"I don't want to," replied Mrs. Gray. "I hope I shall never see him again."

"That is what I hope, and what I am working for," said Marcy. "Good-by, and remember that I will stop here on my way to camp. Don't worry, for I am going among friends."

So saying, Marcy ran down the stairs and out of the house. Arriving at the landing he found there but one boat suitable for his purpose, and that was the skiff Captain Benton gave him on the night he left the gunboat. It was old and leaky, but large enough to accommodate three; so it was shoved from the bank and Hanson was assisted to the seat he was to occupy in the bow. Then Julius got in and picked up the oars, while Marcy lingered to take leave of Ben Hawkins.

"Like as not you'll come back all right," said the latter.

"I hope to, certainly," answered Marcy. "Take care of yourself while I am gone, and remember that I am under obligations to you."

"So am I," exclaimed Hanson, who had had leisure to think the matter over and get a few of his wits about him. "You're a traitor, Ben Hawkins, and I'll see that the Home Guards know it. You're a Confederate soldier, too, and I'll take pains to tell the Yankees of that."

"Hursh yer noise, dar!" said Julius, looking over his shoulder and scowling fiercely at the overseer. "If I drap my wing at you, you drap overboard, suah's you——"

"That will do," said Marcy, stepping into the stern-sheets. "Shove us off, Mr. Hawkins."

This being done, Julius gave way on the oars, and the great house and its surroundings were quickly left out of sight. Then Marcy threw open his coat and drew his holsters in front of him, so that he could easily lay hold of the revolvers that were in them. He did not think he would have any trouble with his prisoner, or that he would be called upon to defend himself against the Home Guards; but he was prepared for an emergency.

It was a long and tedious journey that Marcy had undertaken, for there was no one to talk to, and nothing to see that he had not seen a hundred times before; but it was brought to an end about three in the afternoon, when the strong current in the Roanoke River carried his boat within sight of a Union sentry on the bank. The latter faced them promptly, brought his piece to "arms port," and called out:

"*Who* comes there?"

"Two friends with a rebel prisoner," replied Marcy; and, to his intense amazement, Hanson twisted himself around on his seat, and flatly contradicted him by saying:

"'Taint so, Mister Soldier. It's two rebels with a Union prisoner. I'm so strong for the old flag that the rebels won't let me——"

"Halt, two friends with a rebel prisoner!" shouted the sentry, who was not the proper person to decide any difference of opinion there might be between the boy who sat in the stern-sheets, with a steering-oar in his hand, and the man who sat in the bow with his arms tied behind his back. "Corporal of the guard number eight!"

The only way to halt in that current was to bring the boat ashore, and this Marcy and Julius proceeded to do. They were all on the bank when the corporal came up, and Hanson would have given Marcy a very black character indeed if the non-commissioned officer had been disposed to listen to him; but he said he didn't want to hear a word of it, and ordered Marcy to take off his revolvers. When this had been done, and the corporal had the belt in his hand, he demanded:

"Now, then, what do you want?"

"Of course I shall have to tell my story to the officer of the day, but I should like much to see Captain Burrows," replied Marcy.

"Captain Burrows happens to be officer of the day," said the corporal, who no doubt wondered how Marcy came to be acquainted with him. "Come on, and I will take you to him."

"It might be well to release this man," suggested Marcy. "He has been confined a good while."

"No, I guess I will turn him over just as I got him," said the soldier. "Then the captain can't find any fault with me."

Not to dwell upon the particulars of Marcy's visit to Plymouth, it will be enough to say that he found Captain Burrows at the office of the provost marshal, and that he was just as sociable and friendly as he was when sitting in one of Mrs. Gray's easy-chairs examining Marcy's guns, and talking to him about the shooting on the plantation. He listened patiently and with evident satisfaction to the boy's statements, and then took him to the headquarters of the colonel commanding the post; leaving Hanson, who would have been dull indeed if he had not realized by this time that he was in the worst scrape of his life, to the care of the provost marshal. When Marcy turned to look at him as he left the marshal's office, he told himself that Hanson was in a fair way to see the inside of a Northern prison pen.

He had not talked with the colonel more than five minutes before the latter became aware that Marcy could tell him the very things he most wished to know regarding the condition of the Union people who lived outside his lines. Almost every statement he made was reduced to writing by one of the orderlies, and when the interview was ended at ten o'clock that night, Marcy received the thanks of the commandant and the assurance that the Home Guards should be scattered or captured without loss of time, and his home made a safe place for him to live. Captain Burrows offered to take good care of him and his servant if he would remain all night, but Marcy was so anxious to tell his mother the good news that he thought he had better start for home at once; so he was given the countersign, and a pass commanding all guards and patrols to permit him to enter or leave the lines at any hour of the day or night, and Captain Burrows furnished him with a generous lunch and went with him to his boat to see him off.

"Good-by, Marcy, but not for long," said he. "If I have any influence with the colonel, I shall be riding around in your neighborhood to-morrow afternoon; and when this cruel war is over, I am coming down here on purpose to go quail-shooting with you."

"Take care of the Home Guards, and drive the rebels away from Williamston, and you can go quail-shooting any time," replied Marcy. "But I am afraid it will be a long time before that will come to pass, or my home will be a safe place for me to live," he soliloquized, as he settled back in the stern of the boat and looked up at the stars while Julius plied the oars. "Captain Beardsley will be forced to leave the country and so will Colonel Shelby; but they will go straight to Williamston or some other place that is in the hands of the Confederates, and send first one scouting party and then another into the settlement to trouble us Union people."

That was what Marcy thought, and it was what he told his mother when he reached home the next morning; and knowing that the Federal colonel had not yet had time to "capture or scatter" the Home Guards, he did not remain long in the house, but ate a hasty breakfast and set out for the camp of the refugees, walking under cover of all the fences, and making use of every bush and inequality of the ground to conceal him from the view of any one who might chance to be passing along the road. It was well that these precautions were adopted; for when he and Julius were safe in the woods they looked back and saw about twenty mounted men enter the yard and surround the house. They were the Home Guards, and had been sent there by Beardsley and Shelby, who knew that Marcy would be sure to visit his mother on his return from Plymouth. They were in the house half an hour or more, but went away as empty-handed as they came.

"That means the loss of more property for you, Captain Beardsley," said Marcy to himself: and when the other refugees heard of it they said the same thing, and vowed to make their words good that very night; but, about one o'clock that afternoon, one of the paroled prisoners came into camp with the information that he had barely escaped falling into the hands of a squad of Federal cavalry who were raiding the settlement, and that Beardsley and Shelby were being punished already for the rows they had kicked up in the neighborhood.

"I was hid in my corn-crib when the Yankees went by my house," said the soldier, "and the feller in command of 'em was the same chap I seed with 'em once before. They had scooped in as many as a dozen of the meanest of the Home Guards, Beardsley and Shelby amongst 'em, and were taking 'em off Plymouth way. My old hat riz on my head when I heard Beardsley tell the Yankee cap'n that if he'd go into my house he'd ketch a rebel soldier in there, but that there Yankee cap'n 'lowed that he knowed what he was doing, and that he wasn't hunting no paroled prisoners. Now, who do you reckon told him that a paroled prisoner lived in my house?"

"I did," replied Marcy. "I said a good word for you while I was in Plymouth, and the Yankee colonel said that, if anybody bothered you paroled rebels, it would be your own men and not his. You have brought me good news."

But all the same it did not bring the quiet home life which Marcy thought would be his when those arch-disturbers of the peace of the settlement were carried away from it, for the Confederate authorities interfered with his plans. In April they passed their first general Conscription Act, making all the able-bodied men in the Confederacy between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five subject to military duty, revoked all leaves of absence, and ordered every soldier to report at once to his command on pain of being treated as a deserter. The Act provided for the exemption of those who were able to pay for it, but Marcy did not know it; and supposing that he was as likely to be conscripted as anybody else, he passed the most of his time in camp, where he knew he was safe. We have no space in this book to tell of the other adventures that fell to his lot, and so we must leave him here for the present while we take up the history of two of our Confederate heroes, Rodney Gray and Dick Graham, whom we last saw in Rodney's home in a distant State. They were full-fledged soldiers as you know, having served fifteen months in Price's army and Bragg's. They had their discharges in their pockets and were inclined to say, with Ben Hawkins, that they would not do any more fighting for the Confederacy until some "stay-at-homers," whose names they could mention, had had a chance to see how they liked it. Dick Graham was homesick and longed to see his father and mother; but they were somewhere in Missouri, and Dick could not get to them without crossing the Mississippi, which was closely guarded by the Union navy. There was no way to get around it, however, and that river had to be crossed; and how they made one unsuccessful attempt after another to reach the opposite bank; how Rodney Gray managed to keep out of the army in spite of the efforts that were made to force him into it; and how he turned the tables on his old enemy Tom Randolph, and his Home Guards, who tried to bring him into trouble with the Federals in Baton Rouge, shall be told in the next volume of this series, which will be entitled "RODNEY, THE OVERSEER."

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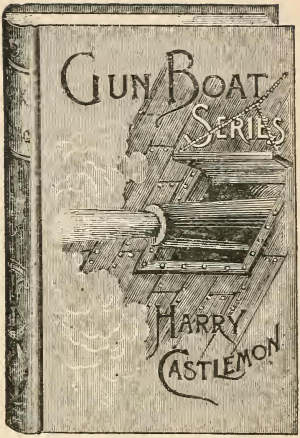

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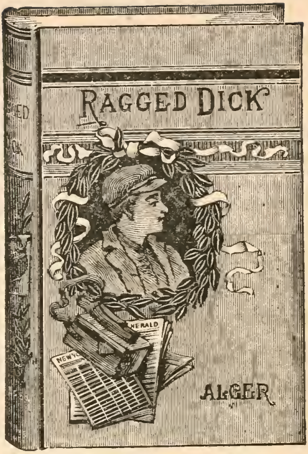

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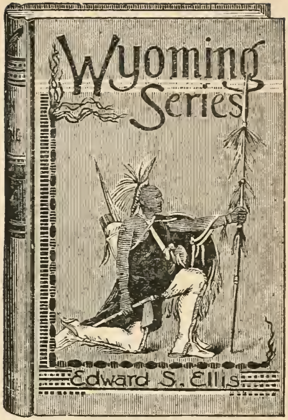

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